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OAKLAND PLANTATION, ITS PEOPLE'S TESTIMONY

by

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August 31, 1998

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report for the National Park Service is to summarize changes and continuities in plantation life associated with the Prudhomme family's Bermuda/Oakland Plantation as recounted in documents but, when possible, as related by individuals associated with the plantation's long history, both as owners and workers. The Prudhomme family owned and operated a string of plantations along Cane River, but, in this account, particular emphasis will be placed on Bermuda/Oakland, which will serve as a focal point for a new national park. The report treats the period from mid-eighteenth century to about 1960, concentrating on the 1850-1960 decades. Others associated with the park service are writing in greater detail on Oakland's history, its founders, and its setting. Along with archaeological, architectural, and ethnographic studies, this oral history summary seeks to lend the color and texture necessary to fully

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understand the property, people, and cultures and convey their richness to the public.

THEMES

As was true also at Magnolia Plantation in its larger Cane River setting two major, related themes emerged at Bermuda/Oakland. (1) One is the compelling role of environment in shaping the region's peoples and their cultural and historical experiences. The Natchitoches area, and particularly that portion of the parish which will be interpreted in the Cane River Creole National ^{Historical} Park and the Cane River Heritage Area, was greatly influenced by the presence of a network of navigable rivers and lakes (in particular, the Red River and its tributaries) and an alluvial soil enriched by these waterways. Other natural resources included impressive stands of timber, both of southern yellow pine and hardwoods, a varied and abundant fauna and flora, nearby salt deposits, and a generally beneficent climate which was conducive to agricultural production and relatively more healthy than the lowlands of southern Louisiana. Additionally, the position of the Natchitoches country as a gateway to Spanish Texas and Mexico--located along a major river, old buffalo trails, Indian traces, and Spanish trade routes--shaped its development profoundly. These conditions encouraged trade between native peoples and with and among Europeans, prompted seasonal and permanent habitation, and promoted agriculture among all of the area's historic population groups. The physical isolation, ruralism, and relative self-sufficiency permitted by abundant natural resources encouraged the

persistance of frontier conditions. Reliance on bayous, lakes, and especially river transportation was one factor in retarding the intrusions of modern transportation and communication systems longer than in more developed areas.

(2) Another theme concerns the equally thorough degree to which the area's historic populations have, in the past and present, altered the area's natural environment to fit their own needs or desires. The early residents, Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans, lived lightly on the landscape, their lives profoundly shaped by the natural environment. They depended upon the natural environment for food and shelter; it shaped their cosmology and character and fostered a degree of interdependence among them. Prior to the nineteenth century their agriculture and other economic enterprises did not significantly alter the landscape. However, these never-numerous early settlers did live off the land and other resources. They fished the lakes and rivers and hunted wild game in the hills, woodlands, prairies and swamps to such a degree that in some areas the supply of wildlife was considerably altered. In creating their homes, villages, and fields, they cleared some woodlands. They hacked out roads in the interest of both trade and convenience. Nevertheless, in the colonial period, these alterations were minor compared to those in the centuries which followed. As technology advanced, the area's residents cleared ancient raft barriers from the rivers and used steam-driven machinery to navigate rivers, process crops, harvest timber, and create a rail system. By the late nineteenth century these factors contributed to a relative

breakdown of the region's isolation, ushering the area into the national mainstream with its attendant advantages and problems.

The interplay between people and environment, over time, provides the general framework for understanding the story of Magnolia and its larger cultural landscape.

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A third but less basic theme concerns the degree to which culture and ethnicity colored the responses made by the area's inhabitants to the demands and opportunities provided by the natural environment.

As I stated in the Magnolia Overview (1996) I believe that Magnolia is more appropriate in depicting the 1840-1860 period, with emphasis on (1) the community forged by enslaved workers, including both their work and home lives, and drawing strongly on the quarters and hospital buildings; (2) the primacy of King Cotton in ante-bellum plantation life in the South, demonstrated through demonstration fields and the gin and blacksmith shops. However, Oakland provides a better opportunity to demonstrate the intricate social organization of planter society, family life and kinship among a variety of populations--workers, owners, and professionals such as Dr. J. A. Laveque. The Big House, with many of its original furnishings and personal items, allows visitors an opportunity to glimpse the domestic lives of the French creole planter class over time. Equally important is the depiction of the changing nature of agriculture and labor during the period after the Civil War and continuing until the 1950s. The existing tenant houses, properly restored, with outbuildings and gardens, can serve as a focus for depiction

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of the domestic lives of tenants as well as owners.

Both properties demonstrate the history of colonization, frontier influences, agricultural history, history of slavery and tenancy labor systems; both contribute to southern family and kinship studies; and both illustrate impact of technology on rural, agricultural life.

As was also true concerning Magnolia and the LeComte-Hertzog families which have dominated Magnolia's history, themes planners should take into consideration at Bermuda/Oakland~~land~~ are the importance to these families of (1) the French culture, (2) Roman Catholicism, (3) family loyalty and kinship, (4) a concept of personal honor, (5) a dedication to agrarian values and a rural lifestyle, and (6) an expansive entrepreneurship which led to a broad swath of properties along Cane River, in the town of Natchitoches, and elsewhere in northern Louisiana.

The saga of Bermuda/Oakland, Magnolia and other Cane River plantations is not only the story of its owners. The lives of several generations of workers are inextricably interwoven with those of the Prudhommes and other planter families. Therefore planners are urged to look closely at the Franco-African and African-American communities associated with Bermuda/Oakland and other plantations along Cane River. Among the themes they display over two centuries are (1) an ability to adjust to massive economic, political, and social changes; (2) efforts to build their own institutions; and (3) the importance of family, kinship, and the church in these efforts.

This is the story of a tenacious family's experiences in the building and operation of a cotton plantation on the banks of

Cane River in Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana. It is also the story of a way of life that it and other planter families created over two centuries along that section of the river between the town of Natchitoches and Isle Brevelle, a way of life so satisfying despite its hardships that the region became known as the Cote Joyeuse, or Joyous Coast. The Prudhomme name dominates the story, as it was the primary paternal line associated with the plantation now known as Oakland. But, following French manorial and local custom, the Prudhommes intermarried extensively with other enterprising French planter families such as the Cloutiers, Bossier, and LeComtes, and these lines, too, contributed to the plantation's success and the flourishing extended family culture.

The Prudhommes of Oakland were and are hardworking, gregarious, devout, and ingenious people whose roots are firmly anchored in the rich river-bottom lands, rolling hills, and verdant pineywoods of the region settled by their French ancestors. This is their story, and that of the plantation they nurtured for two hundred years. As well, it is the story as well *delux* of the workers, both free and unfree, whose labor and talents also contributed mightily to the creation of a successful plantation economy and enviable social and cultural life among the plantation elites of the Cote Joyeuse. The African-American and Creole peoples who worked on Oakland also created their own multi-faceted life styles, institutions, and community values, sometimes similar to that of their owners/employers, and sometimes dissimilar and uniquely their own. For the most part,

Oakland's workers shared the Prudhommes strong attachment to the land, preference for a rural life style, reliance on a powerful faith, and devotion to family, kin, and neighbors. Despite differences in ethnicity and condition and significant inequalities in wealth, Oakland's owners and workers had large areas of commonality which fostered mutual respect and dependence during many periods and resulted in many enduring relationships. That, in fact, is one way in which Oakland's story is so remarkable. ~~Seven~~^{Six} generations of owners and, in many cases, workers lived and worked on Oakland Plantation through an unbroken sequence of events which included periods of prosperity and depression, war and peace, and dramatic changes in governments, agriculture, technology, and labor systems. Throughout it all, Oakland survived and so did its people. This is their narrative, transmitted, whenever possible, in their own words.

In the pages that follow many topics will be touched upon which are dealt with in greater length in the tapes and transcriptions. The oral histories will provide park planners and visitors insight into a rich human tapestry. Among these topics are family life, birth, courtship, marriage, illness, death, education, work, religious life, recreation, celebrations, superstitions, foodways, herblore, race relations, technological changes, employer and employee relations, and gender roles, to name a few. Particularly moving are the narrators' observations and insights into the human costs of technological and agricultural changes.

THE BEGINNINGS

In the early 1700s, a young Frenchman, Jean Pierre Phillip Prudhomme, made the fateful decision to go to his country's colony in America, eventually making his way to the Natchitoches Post, most likely never to see his homeland and parents again. Sometime in the late 1700s, a young African also left his parents and homeland forever. He made the trip to the Americas as a captive. Eventually he too would come to Natchitoches and the Cote Joyeuse, the property of a planter named Langlois. After a few years, the African, who now had the name Hilario, married Jeanne, a creole slave of Emanuel Prudhomme, the----- of Jean Pierre. They had a son, whom they named Helaire in honor of his father, the African. That boy, baptized along with twenty-two others in 1809, was the first of many generations of Helaires to live on Bermuda/Oakland. Through Helaire's mother Jeanne, the line goes back to the very inception of the plantation. The lives of the two families--the Prudhommes and the Helaires, remain intertwined until the early 1960s when mechanization revolutionized agriculture and human relations on southern cotton plantations and displaced tenants. Other worker families have equally long associations with Oakland, and some will be highlighted as well.

SECTION ONE; THE PIONEERING PERIOD (1715-1815)

Part One: The Setting

I. GENERAL HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The area changed political jurisdictions several times during the colonial period. The French period was from 1714 to 1763. The Spanish obtained Louisiana at the end of the French and Indian War in 1763 and governed the region until 1800. Exasperated with the expensive and unprofitable colony, Spain returned Louisiana to France in the secret treaty of San Ildefonse in October, 1800. The treaty was ratified in 1801, and the United States Congress was notified in 1802. The United States President, Thomas Jefferson, alarmed that Napoleon now controlled access to the Mississippi River and New Orleans, the route for nearly half of the United States' trade goods, quickly negotiated for the purchase of Louisiana, which took place on April 30, 1803. The United States took possession officially on December 20, 1803.

These jurisdictional changes had little immediate effect on the Cane River country. Residents there had frequent contact with the French and Spanish for nearly a century. The change to American jurisdiction would eventually have severe repercussions, not all of them welcomed by the French residents of Core Joyeuse.

One of the two most significant changes were that land grants made under the French and Spanish were brought into question and closely scrutinized. Many long-term residents failed to provide acceptable documentation for reconfirmation of their claims and lost part or all of their land. The United States discontinued the practice of making generous grants of free land; vacant lands had to be purchased from the government at fair market value. A second major result of the changeover to American jurisdiction was not immediately felt but was more profound in the long run-- it encouraged major demographic shifts, in conjunction with the cotton expansions following the end of the War of 1812 in 1815. By the thousands, Americans from the worn-out lands of the Lower South swarmed into the Mississippi and Red River valleys, seeking fresh lands for cotton production, often bringing with them their slaves. This influx by no means destroyed the French culture in the area but it did diminish it. A third change was that the generally cooperative relationship that both the French and the Spanish had with the region's Indians deteriorated under American rule, resulting in the exodus of the Caddos in the mid 1830s.

As early as 8,000 B.C. northern Louisiana was inhabited by Native Americans, identified by archaeologists as members of the San Patrice culture. Historic Indians of the region were generally members of the Caddoan culture; their presence in the area can be documented for about 1,500 years. Among them were the Adaes, Doustioni, Natchitoches, Ouachita, and Yatasi.

The Natchitoches Indians, for which the town and parish were named, had frequent interaction with the first French settlers.

One primary village of the Natchitoches existed in the vicinity of the present town of Natchitoches. A major burial site on Fish Hatchery Road, containing burials from the period of coexistence with the French settlers, has been extensively studied. This was the area mentioned by the French explorer Henri Tonti in 1690 when he visited the Natchitoches village, making the first documented contact between the French and the area's native peoples. One writer states that the Natchitoches were destroyed by epidemical disease in the mid 1780s. Another argues that they left the Natchitoches area to join kinsmen in Texas after 1805 in response to pressures from the Americans.

The Natchitoches were not the only Native Americans in the area at the time of European contact. A list of known tribal groups in the area was compiled by Spanish authorities in 1766; they included "the Natchitoches, Apalaches, Yatazees, Pequenos Nakoidoches, Pequenos Nadocos, Pequenos Cadox, Grandes Cadox, Kidesinques, Kuakanas, Chekaniches and Kaunion, united, Kuayaches and L'lachitas, united, Kankaguayes, and Laitanos." Native American villages dotted the Red River valley. With rare exceptions, relations between the native peoples and the newcomer Europeans were friendly. Extensive trade and familial bonds developed between the Indians, French, and Spanish. Indian enslavement was practiced by the French settlers, but the slaves were generally captives of local tribes or were purchased by the French from local Indians or Spanish traders or settlers. Usually these enslaved Native Americans sold to the French settlers were not native to the area, and many were eventually emancipated by their French owners.

As in Canada and the Ohio Valley, the French were more successful than the English in making political and economic allies of native peoples. Violent confrontations were rare. However, one notable bloody encounter did take place between the French and the Natchez Indians in 1731, but local Indians assisted the French in the Natchez' defeat.

Although the Natchitoches appear to have left the area by the first decade of the eighteenth century, many other Indian groups of the Caddoan culture remained at least until the mid 1830s when they were pressured into removal to Oklahoma. The genetic and cultural imprint of the area's native peoples remained, however, and remains vital today.

Native American habitation in the general area in which Bermuda/Oakland would be located can be dated to the prehistoric period. Mounds have been recorded on Melrose Plantation, near Cloutierville, and near Cypress, all less than a dozen miles away.

Even before the French established farms in the area which came to be known as the Cote Joyeuse (extending roughly from Natchitoches to Isle Brevelle) a few Spanish settlers may have intermarried with local Indians creating a mestizo population. This practice continued among the early French settlers. Settlers developed extensive economic and kinship ties with area Indians, following the practice of many of the post's residents.

Among the families associated with Bermuda/Oakland's history that intermarried with Indians (either legally or according to common law) were the LeComtes, Cloutiers, and Brevelles. In fact, almost all major French families settling in the area prior to

1800 produced mixed blood lines. Church and family records are replete with examples. French settler Pierre Bertrand had children by an Indian woman, Juana, according to the 1781 marriage record of their son, Louis Bertrand. Louis Joseph Blanpain and Margueritte, an Indian, recorded their son's baptism in 1751. Jean Baptiste Brevel and "Anne, of the Cadoes" recorded a legitimate marriage in 1736, and several records in the 1790s identify Barthelemy LaCour as the common law husband of Marie Ursulle [Ursula], Caddo. Many more examples could be cited. The Brevel farm was very close to where Bermuda/Oakland would be located. It is this family for which Bayou Brevelle is named.

Not only were the blood lines of the European settlers infused with that of native peoples by the middle of the colonial period, early probate records show a cultural diffusion as well. Just as European goods and cultural practices strongly impacted Indian life, Indian tools, foods, household goods, items of clothing, and expressions became part of the everyday world of the Europeans of the region.

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Natchitoches was founded in 1714 with the purpose of serving as a French military and trading outpost which would block Spanish eastward expansion. The spare outpost of Fort St. Jean Baptiste was first built in 1716, two years after Louis Juchereau de St. Denis had established the first permanent French settlement in the region. The fort was rebuilt in 1733 according to plans made by French architect-engineer Ignac Francois Broutin. It functioned as a French outpost until 1762. During that interim the French people assigned to the post developed brisk trade with the region's native peoples as well as with the Spanish, although much of the latter was clandestine. They soon moved outside the fort, developed a village, and then, after their periods of military service had ended, many established farms and small plantations along the Red River [later the Cane], the nucleus of what would develop into a prosperous plantation society.

Jean Pierre Phillip Prudhomme, however, was not a planter. He came to Poste St. Jean-Baptiste des Natchitoches as a soldier, born in Romans, Province of Dauphine, France. This first of the Prudhomme dynasty in Natchitoches then became a merchant and trader. According to family tradition, on one of his frequent trading trips to New Orleans he became acquainted with another merchant, Joseph Picard, and in 1725 married Picard's daughter, Catherine Meslier (or Mellier). Genealogist Elizabeth Shown Mills believes that Catherine was not a New Orleans' merchant's daughter but "one of a shipload of girls sent from the Salpetriere aboard La Baleine in 1719," one of the famed casket girls. Marriage records identify Jean Prudhomme's wife as

Catherine Mellier, a native of Paris, from the Parish of St. Sulpice, and the daughter of Joseph Picard and Catherine Mellier. In any case, the couple returned to Natchitoches and reared a family which included the progenitor of the Oakland line of Prudhommes, Jean-Baptiste "Jeanneaux" Prudhomme, born in 1736 at Natchitoches.

Jean-Baptiste became a physician and planter. He succeeded surgeon-major Daniel Pain as the fort's physician but retired from the practice of medicine after the Spanish acquired Louisiana in 1763. Thereafter he was captain of the militia for a short time, then was in private practice while establishing himself as a planter, expanding upon land he had acquired in 1758. Evidence that he was still practicing medicine is found in the French Archives at the Natchitoches Parish Library. He investigated the death of Etienne Pavie's slave Pierre, a runaway whom Pavie frequently beat and chained. Prudhomme, surgeon, "demanded of the declarant [Pavie] the cause of death...he responded ...thathe could not prove anything or the other, whereupon they examined him again and found a fluff of cornsilk in his mouth which helped him to swallow his tongue, which choked him."

After the French and Indian War which ended in 1763, Louisiana was ceded to Spain, and the fort at Natchitoches deteriorated. When the United States acquired the area in the 1803 Louisiana Purchase, the Americans replaced the fort with Fort Claiborne at another site in the village of Natchitoches. By this time, however, the French imprint on the area was strong.

Living was rudimentary during the colonial period. Structures occupied by early French colonists were usually quite simple. Post-in-the-ground, cypress and bousillage constructions, such as can still be seen in the Badin-Roque house, remained standard well into the nineteenth century for the less affluent, but the more prosperous planters by the early 1800s had begun the construction of West Indian-style raised cottages--enclosed houses on stilts or pillars but still constructed of cypress and bousillage mortar.

A Spanish fort, and mission dating back to the early eighteenth century was located a dozen or so miles west of the present Natchitoches. Los Adaes served as the capital of the Province of Texas after 1729 and was the administrative center of the government for forty-four years. The fort was established to protect the nearby San Miguel mission and other Spanish missions that dotted east Texas in 1716. The post was closed in 1773, and its Spanish inhabitants were ordered to relocate to San Antonio. Some did, but others remained in the region and founded the settlement in East Texas called Nacogdoches. Others eventually came back to the Los Adaes area, and their descendants, along with descendants of the Native-American population, are representative of Natchitoches earliest inhabitants.

After the Louisiana Purchase, French Natchitoches passed into the hands of the United States, and its jurisdiction ended at the disputed border with the Spanish Colony, in the general area of now-abandoned Los Adaes. The area, long a "no-man's land" claimed by both the French and Spanish, became a Neutral Strip

officially, and became one of the most lawless regions in the Southwest.

Colonial Natchitoches, though a French possession, was home to many nationalities. Among the original forty settlers whose origin is known, most were from France or French Canada, but there were a few from Mexico, Italy, Holland, Switzerland, and Holland.

Efforts in the building of the French and Spanish colony and parish made by non-Europeans who also labored here are often overlooked. Along what is now Cane River, non-free peoples--Africans and those of African descent--were critical in establishing the economic foundation of the Natchitoches post and, beginning in the colonial period, a fledgling plantation society. Under the direction of their owners and sometimes working with them side by side, slave field workers cleared the fields for planting and produced the colonial crops and foodstuffs. Slave artisans assisted in the construction of homes and outbuildings.

In the 1722 census of the inhabitants of Fort St. Jean Baptiste des Natchitoches, 20 black slaves and 8 Indian slaves were enumerated among a total population of 54. Four years later, 32 black slaves were among the population of 105. In 1766, among the non-Indian inhabitants of Natchitoches post, nearly 40 percent were black or Franco-African slaves, and by 1800 that percentage had surpassed 50 percent. Most of the earliest enslaved people at the post had been born in Africa, although some were acclimatized in the French colonies of the

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Caribbean. They were or became French speakers and absorbed into their culture many aspects of their owners', including Roman Catholicism. However, these early workers also retained vestiges of their mother culture and many carried African names. The average size of slaveholdings in the colonial period was less than ten.

These early workers shared the risks and challenges of their owners--the hard work and the unhealthy conditions. Survival itself was often a precarious undertaking, and fevers, indiscriminately and with chilling regularity, devastated the settlers, white and black. Death by accident, particularly due to drowning in flooded lakes, bayous, and rivers, took its toll as well. In this risky, hard, and often lonely existence, French and Spanish colonists, local Indians, and Africans often formed liaisons with each other, as mentioned before. These mixtures not only created a Mestizo population, they also produced a Creole community of free people of color who became substantial property holders in the Isle Brevelle area adjacent to Bermuda/Oakland. Prudhomme slaves and former slaves contributed strongly to the Creole population. There is some evidence to suggest that Jean Baptiste Prudhomme (son of Emanuel Prudhomme and grandson of Dr. Jean Baptiste Prudhomme) contributed to Creole population by siring a daughter, Marie Therese Aspasia Prudhomme, in 1826 with a slave woman Pompose. In 1843, Emanuel and Gabriel St. Anne Prudhomme donated 488 acres of land to free woman of color Marie Pompose and her children, "wanting to give proof of their affection."

The cotton boom precipitated by Eli Whitney's gin and a demand for cotton for England's textile mills combined with the closing of the African slave trade in 1808 to generate a brisk domestic slave trade. Thousands of workers were transported from the Upper South to the fresh, fertile cotton lands of the Lower South states such as Louisiana. Some accompanied migrating owners; others were taken "down South" by professional slave traders. Between 1810 and 1819, Louisiana's population increased by 100 percent, its highest rate of increase in the antebellum period. In the boom years between 1815 and 1819, ambitious Louisiana cotton planters sought additional slaves, and owners and traders of the southeast and northeast responded. High cotton prices accelerated that trade after 1815, with New Orleans and Natchez serving as the major markets. Between 1810 and 1819, Louisiana's slave population increased by 99 percent, also the highest of any other decade during the antebellum period. Many of these slaves were bought by Mississippi River planters, but Natchitoches was also impacted by this significant increase in chattels from the Upper South.

Before its transition to an agricultural society, trade was the life blood of the early French colony. In addition to being a military buffer intended to check any expansion of the Spanish Colony to the west, the Natchitoches fort and post was, in effect, a trading organization. The post provided Indian tribes with such items as rifles, powder, shot, hatchets, pick axes, knives, beads, blankets, and clothing; area Indians provided the post with valuable hides and pelts and foodstuffs. The post

also engaged in a brisk, though often clandestine, trade with the Spanish, particularly in cattle.

Trade with the Indians was very successful. The French established local trading posts throughout the region, such as that of Jean Lagross among the Yatasee in the vicinity of Campti during the 1720s. A 1722 census report for the Post chronicled trade goods sent to New Orleans, including 1,000 horses, 150 pack mules, 900 pounds of indigo, 15 fanegas of indigo seed, 30,000 packages of tobacco, 5,000 pounds of tallow bacon and meats, salted and dried, 36,000 deer skins, and approximately 1,000 gallons of bear oil. These products were from both the Indian trade and marketable products of the post's habitants and planters, during an unstated period of time.

Some colonial planters successfully grew and marketed indigo. Indigo knives regularly appear on early inventories, and an occasional indigo vat appears on a colonial plat, one of them a Prudhomme family plantation. The crop was shipped by barge to New Orleans, where it was auctioned and ultimately exported to Europe. Although indigo was not produced in sufficient volume to be considered a major commercial crop for Natchitoches colonials, the indigo trade between Louisiana planters and British merchants during the Spanish period was brisk as well as illegal and caused the Spanish government some concern.

Tobacco was far more important in the local economy--so much so that it was occasionally used as a form of currency. Slaves, for example, were often purchased with tobacco. Natchitoches tobacco was considered to be of unusually high quality and brought good prices. As in Jamestown, Virginia, the European

colonists of Natchitoches learned to cultivate tobacco from the native peoples. They discovered a ready market for tobacco in France, and by 1720, Natchitoches planters were exporting the crop. Marketing was difficult, however, for like the indigo shipments, tobacco had to be transported to New Orleans by barge.

These were the only major commercial crops of the early colonial period, but farmers and planters grew Indian corn and sugar cane for their subsistence and for local markets. Herding, or stockraising, was an important auxiliary to trade and agriculture throughout the colonial period.

At the very end of the colonial period, a watershed in Natchitoches economic history occurred with the introduction of cotton cultivation into the area. The French had grown cotton as a staple in Louisiana since the 1740s, some fifty years before Eli Whitney's gin was invented. However, the earlier gin used by French planters was expensive and difficult to use. Whitney's 1793 invention was simple, cheap, and efficient. An expansion into the Lower South, where cotton could now be profitably grown, commenced about 1795. In 1801, when prices in Louisiana for slaves and land were relatively low, cotton brought 22 cents to 44 cents per pound, a powerful incentive for migration to the area. After Louisiana came under the jurisdiction of the United States, the migration of Americans to Louisiana intensified.

Prices for cotton declined somewhat in the tense years before the War of 1812 broke out between England and the United States, dropping even further after the war was declared. But at the war's end in 1815, prices climbed to 29.4 cents per pound and in

1817 peaked at a phenomenal average price of 33.9 cents per pound.

In 1769, 740 people lived in the district of Natchitoches. Already, more than half of heads of households were planters. Only eighteen were traders. Herdsmen, travellers, and hunters still made up a sizeable proportion of the population. By 1799, out of a total population of 1,724, 908 were slaves, more than half. In summation, along Cane River between 1714 and 1815 a European frontier fort and trading post, established in an area primarily inhabited by Native Americans, developed into an agricultural community. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Cote Joyeuse and River aux Cannes areas were on the threshold of developing into true plantation societies, among the first in Louisiana, and rivalling those developing at the same time along the Mississippi and False Rivers.

Part Two:

PRUDHOMME AND ASSOCIATED FAMILIES

1715-1815

I. FAMILY BACKGROUND

Bermuda/Oakland Plantation would not be established until 1818-1821 by Jean Pierre Emanuel Prudhomme and his wife Catherine Lambre. However, both of these families have roots deep in the colonial period of the Natchitoches settlement. Part of the land that would ultimately form Bermuda/Oakland Plantation was obtained from French and Spanish land grants made to the Prudhommes, Lambres, Metoyers, and other French families (including the Rousseaus, from whom the portion upon which the Big House resides) in the mid and late 1700s.

As mentioned briefly before, the Prudhomme line in Natchitoches Parish began with Jean Pierre Phillip Prudhomme, of Romans, Province of Dauphine, France. Born about 1673, the son of A. Pierre Prudhomme and _____ Bruchard (Bouchard), he came to the colonies with the French Army. He married Catherine Meslier (Mellier, Meillier) [Picard] in New Orleans. Jean Pierre Phillipe died January 22, 1739, in Natchitoches. His widow remarried, to Pierre Alorge, in 1741 and would live until October 14, 1781.

Among their children was Jean Baptiste, who became the "Docteur de Roi" of the Natchitoches post for a time. He first married Marie Francoise Chever (b. 9 May 1739), and they had one

son, Jean Baptiste, who was baptized January 8, 1757.

Marie Francoise died within the month of her son's birth; she was only eighteen-years-old. The child died in infancy.

In the 1766 Spanish Census, the household of Jean Baptiste Prudhomme included himself, his second wife Marie Francoise Josephe Henriette Charlotte Corantine (Colantine) [whom he married in 1758], two young sons (Jean Baptiste II, born in 1759; Emanuel, born in 1762) and a daughter (Marie Louise, born in 1760). The Spanish probably repeated the enumerations of the French census of 1765/1766, and Antoine, born in 1765 was left off the Spanish enumeration. The household also included two slaves. Jean Baptiste Prudhomme reported his landholdings--9 arpents of river frontage with its "usual depth", as well as 6 horses, no cattle, and 10 hogs. He was referred to as captain of the militia on that census enumeration.

In a February, 1774, tax list and census of slaveholders, "Mr Bte Prudhomme" reported owning five "negro or mullato males," two "negresses or mulattresses," four "negro or mulatto children under twelve," and one female Indian. In September of that same year, he reported eight negro males and three negro females, reflecting little change in his slave force. Baptism and conveyance records reveal the names of a few of these. Presumably still among the slaves in his possession was a "negress named Conga," bought in 1775 from Miguel Sanchez. Therese, slave of Baptiste Prudhomme, chirugien (physician), and Clemence, were both identified as Jean Baptiste's slaves when they were baptized on April 1, 1766. The year before his death

Jean Baptiste Prudhomme complained to the acting commandant of the post about a runaway slave named Christophe, about 20.

In addition to baptizing his workers, Jean Baptiste Prudhomme also provided for Christian burial of at least some of his slaves, according to church records. On December 28, 1776, an unnamed negrito slave of his was buried and that fact duly noted in the church records, as were two more in 1778. Two more slaves died in November, 1786, shortly after their master's death in October. Yet another died and was buried in early December, 1787.

By 1774, the family of Jean Baptiste Prudhomme and his wife included Jean Baptiste (1759-1766), Marie Louise (b. 1760), Emanuel (b. 1762), Antoine (b. 1765), Dominique (b. 1767), Annette (b. 1768), Suzette (Suzanne) (b. 1774).

Meanwhile, the children matured and assumed adult responsibilities. Emanuel Prudhomme was listed as a militia cavalryman on the 1780 and 1782 Revolutionary War Rosters for Natchitoches. Antoine was present as well in 1782. In most respects, Jean Baptiste Prudhomme I and his family were typical of the colonists who made successful transitions from habitant to small planter in the late eighteenth century. Throughout the latter eighteenth century they increased their slaveholdings modestly as they cleared and acquired additional land for cultivation and stockraising.

Jean Baptiste Prudhomme died in Natchitoches October 21, 1786, at the age of fifty. The following year, his widow, age 50, [who herself died in February 1788] was listed as the head of a household which also consisted of sons Antoine, 21, and

Dominique, 18, as well as daughters Annette, 16, and Suzette (Suzanne), 13. They reported owning three tracts of land totalling 14 arpents of river frontage, 24 slaves, 12 cows, and 20 horses. Her eldest son, Emanuel, 23, resided in his own household, along with his wife Catherine Lambre, 22 (whom he had married in January, 1784), and their son Jean Baptiste II, 2. They owned 2 tracts of land with 10 arpents of river frontage, 10 cows and 2 horses.

In the early 1790's Emanuel's residence was still near the Natchitoches post, on "one of the earliest plantations in the parish," probably that of his father, Jean Baptiste Prudhomme. However, he was also establishing his own plantation thirteen miles below Natchitoches at a site on the Red River called "Limping Village" in early records. It was not on his own land grant, but on a 1787 claim by Nicholas Rousseau, that he established Bermuda. With Rousseau's agreement, he worked that land, raising tobacco and indigo, for nearly twenty years before acquiring it from Rousseau in the latter 1790s. The family built a small, typical Creole cottage near the river bank and, with the assistance of slave labor, experimented with the growing of cotton within only a few years after Eli Whitney's invention had made its cultivation and profitable ginning possible in Louisiana. Family lore, repeated through many generations, credits Emanuel Prudhomme with being the first Louisiana planter to successfully cultivate cotton on a large scale. AP.

Again according to family tradition, frequent flooding of the Red River [now the Cane] perusaded the Prudhommes to build their

more substantial second home on Bermuda at its present site, at a safe distance from the occasional rampages of the river. By 1818, the Prudhommes were prospering, and they could well afford to build a more substantial plantation house for their growing family's needs. It was a four-room, traditional creole raised cottage, composed of native materials, cypress, handmade bricks, bousillage adobe from local clay, moss, and deer hair. The kitchen and other service buildings were detached. Within a few years, however, additional rooms were added. In 1821 Emanuel and Catherine Prudhomme made a buying trip to France for additional furnishings. While touring France, and perhaps the continent, they had their portraits painted by a Parisian artist.

As had his father Jean Baptiste, Emanuel Prudhomme was building his working plantation with slave labor. In Emanuel Prudhomme's 1787 enumeration were 15 slaves. Conveyance, baptism, and other demographic records provide information on some of them.

Some of those inventoried in 1787 were recently acquired. For example, in August, 1786, Emanuel bought from Barthelemey Campanel two young Jamaican boys, James and Peter, for \$500. Occasionally, purchases were disputed. In 1797, he had to prove that a grif slave named Evangeliste, about 17, was himself a slave and the son of a slave. He had bought Evangeliste from the Widow Cloutier. He brought forth several witnesses to testify that Evangeliste was the son of an Indian woman (Savage) who was, at the time of his birth, a slave. slave

Names of other early Prudhomme slaves can be gleaned from baptism records. In 1788, Francisca, born March 20, was

baptised. She and her godparents, Juan and Francisca, were all slaves of Emanuel Prudhomme, as were Monica, a "negra adult", baptized in 1791, and her sponsors Manuel and Naneta. Another adult, Maria Marta, was baptized in 1792. Her godparents were Guillermo and Maria Elana Leonora, also slaves. In 1795, twenty-year-old Iago, "native of the Congo nation", was baptized. His godparents, also members of the Prudhomme slave community, were Iago (his namesake) and Maria Anna. Also in April, 1795, Prudhomme slaves Magdalena (two months old and the daughter of Juanna; godparents, Pedro and Maria Luisa) and Anna, one year old mulata, daughter of Maria Luisa (godparents: Agustin and Dorotea) were baptized. ✓

Seven-year-old Louis, son of Ursule, was baptized in November, 1796; one of his sponsors was Francois, also a slave of Emanuel Prudhomme. At that same baptismal service, Honore, one year old son of Marthe was baptized, as was Marie, aged three, a daughter of Marthe as well. Emanuel Prudhomme's slave Marie Ann in April 1797 served as a godparent in the baptism of an infant belonging to Marie Therese Coincoin, free person of color.

In April, 1800, a four-month-old grif, Maria, daughter of Ursele, was baptized. Godparents were free person of color Louis and Maria Celeste, "a slave of Manuel Prudhomme." Charles, another Prudhomme slave, served as godparent for an infant daughter of Margueritte, slave of Marie Therese Coincoin (fpc) Marthe's child Marie Therese, nine-months, was baptized on that same occasion. Godparents included Henriette, also of Emanuel Prudhomme's slave community. *des*

Church death records show the burial of slaves belonging to Emanuel Prudhomme in November, 1787, October, 1789, and June, 1791.

How the colonial Prudhommes treated their slaves in terms of food, shelter, work, and discipline is not known, but they, like many other Cane River French slave owners, took seriously their responsibility to baptize slaves in the Catholic faith. No church served the area in the 1780s and 1790s, and baptisms were performed irregularly by visiting priests from Opelousas, on the plantations of prominent planters such as the Prudhommes, LeComtes, or Cloutiers.

If the reports are correct, Emanuel Prudhomme's slave property more than doubled in the three years between 1787 and 1790, perhaps reflecting his inheritance from his father. In the Catholic Church tax rolls of March, 1790, Emanuel Prudhomme reported 36 slaves and was accordingly taxed 37 reales of silver. Brothers Dominique and Antoine reported 1 and 3 slaves respectively. Under Spanish jurisdiction as they had under French rule, the Prudhommes continued to function as good citizens, generally paying their taxes (Manuel was late in 1793 and 1795) and, the males, dutifully serving their time with the militia except when officially excused for hunting.

The family continued to prosper. In a 1795 list of slaveholders, Dominique Prudhomme reported 1, Antoine Prudhomme, 26, and Emanuel Prudhomme, 38. He was surpassed only by his brother-in-law, Remy Lambre, and Pierre Metoyer.

CHANGING JURISDICTIONS

Emanuel and Catherine Lambre Prudhomme adjusted to yet

another change of flags. Natchitoches came under American jurisdiction in 1803. Titles to the mid-eighteenth century claims were in jeopardy with each change of jurisdiction.

On February 5, 1812, the United States confirmed the claim to Section 104, Township 8 North, Range 6, the claim on which their plantation house was located. It consisted of 1,254 acres in Isle Brevelle. This was among many claims the Prudhomme family sought to confirm.

1. tract 20 acres fronting on each side of the river with depth of 40 acres, received by deed of conveyance from Nicholas Rousseau "to whom the same was originally granted ... 18th January 1797. [This is the portion upon which the Big House is located, and which the family claimed to have worked since the 1780s].

2. tract of land on both sides of said river containing 6 acres in front on each side of the river with the depth of 40 acres, by deed of conveyance from Couga, a free negro, who purchased from Dominique Rachal, to whom the same was originally granted by concession dated 27th Nov. 1787.

3. a tract of land situated on the Bayou Connent...containing 12 acres on each side the said Bayou, by virtue of a deed of conveyance purchase made at public sale of the Estate of J.Bte. Brevel, to whom the said was originally granted by concession dated 13 January 1787.

4. Also a tract of land on the left hand side of said river (descending) containing about 6 acres in front &---deep, by virtue of deed of conveyance from Madm.---St. Deny in 1788.

5. Also a tract of land on the same side of said river and joining the last claimed tract, containing 5 1/2 acres in front, with 40 acres depth, by virtue of a deed of conveyance from J. M. Arnaud, as executor of the estate of Pierre Badin, who purchased the same at public sale of the Estate of St. Prise (?)--40 years past.

6. Also a tract of two acres in front with the ordinary depth of 40 acres, on the same side of Red River, bounded above and below by other lands of the claimant by virtue of deed of conveyance from S. Armand, executor as aforesaid of the Estate of Pierre Badin, who has been in possession of the same agreeably to the requisitions of the Acts of Congress....

7. Also claiming a tract of land situated at the end of the Lake Saline at the place known by the name of Nahoy (?) -Cayes, containing 10 acres in front, of the Lake, with the depth of 40 acres, by virtue of deed conveyance from Sebastian Prudhomme to whom the same was originally granted...."

It appears that all of these claims were eventually confirmed.

AGRICULTURAL CHANGES

Emanuel and Catherine Lambre Prudhomme witnessed and participated in the beginnings of an agricultural revolution. Cotton culture was introduced, perhaps by Emanuel Prudhomme, in the region in the 1790s and was being produced on a large scale by the 1820s-- a crop very different than the indigo and tobacco of an earlier time.

Cotton production in the Lower South became economically feasible after the 1795 invention of the Whitney gin. By the late 1790s small amounts of cotton were already being produced in the region and are documented in local succession records. By 1800, high cotton prices encouraged local planters to convert most of their arable land to its production. Throughout his lifetime, Emanuel Prudhomme would display extraordinary foresight in expanding his cotton lands along the river. In the 1790s, in addition to purchases of lands claimed by other early settlers, he sometimes acquired small tracts through trade for livestock.

OTHER ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Like many other planters, Emanuel Prudhomme also engaged in ranching--breeding and selling cattle, horses, and other livestock--and his heart appears to have been in this enterprise, at least in his prime working years.

The circumstances under which the Prudhommes received their vacherie, or ranch are these. As early as 1780s American settlers were illegally swarming into a disputed area between the original French and Spanish colonies. Some were fugitives; others engaged in clandestine trade. Alarmed, Spanish authorities made generous land grants to a dozen or so Frenchmen whom they had come to trust, whose presence could act as a buffer. And they could watch for "strangers" suspected of engaging in illicit activity. One of the trusted individuals was Emanuel Prudhomme.

After French Louisiana passed to United States jurisdiction in 1803, the situation deteriorated markedly in the now official neutral strip on which Prudhomme's ranch was located. The full

and colorful story of the neutral ground is beyond the scope of this overview but is worth investigating by researchers since Bermuda/Oakland's primary family was intimately involved in its history.

SECTION TWO

THE BEGINNINGS OF A PLANTER SOCIETY

1815-1835

I. GENERAL HISTORICAL CONTEXT

After the War of 1812 ended in 1815, the nation entered into one of the most expansive periods in its history. In fact, the period from 1815 to 1824 is called the Era of Good Feelings because it was generally a period of prosperity, exuberant nationalism, and was free of party strife since only one political party remained. The Federalist Party, never strong in much of the South and virtually without support in Louisiana--had disappeared. Many of its ideas, however, continued in the National Republican faction of the only official party remaining--the Republican Party. The other faction was the Democratic Republican faction, the party of Thomas Jefferson's hand-picked successors in the presidency--Madison and Monroe. Both factions had their adherents in Louisiana and in Natchitoches Parish.

The period was characterized by a major westward movement, and Louisiana's population expanded dramatically. By 1824, party politics had begun to reappear. In Louisiana, party affiliation generally was divided into pro-Andrew Jackson and anti-Jackson groups. In 1828, when Jackson ran for the presidency a second time, the state was seriously divided between two southern candidates--Jackson, and National Republican Henry Clay. Clay's conservative banking policies and support of protective tariffs appealed to many of the larger planters, but Jackson was very

popular in Louisiana as the result of the Battle of New Orleans. In the late 1820s, two-party politics had returned. Clay's supporters in Louisiana were the Whigs--who continued the traditions of the National Republicans. Jackson's supporters were the Democrats. North Louisiana and the cotton parishes in general were probably more inclined to be Democrats, but many of The more conservative and nationalistic planters favored the Whig position. The Prudhommes were staunch Democrats. Party politics was taken deadly seriously by many: In 1839 a duel took place over political differences between a member of Congress, Pierre E. Bossier of Natchitoches, a Democrat, and General Francois Gaienne of Cloutierville, a Whig, in which Gaienne was killed. Eventually, several others would be killed from both factions. Pierre Phanor Prudhomme was one of kinsman Bossier's "friends," present at the duel.

By the mid 1830s, many other national developments began to exert an influence. The Age of Jackson was known for its policy of Indian removal. Almost all eastern tribes had been removed to the Indian Nation west of the Mississippi by the end of Jackson's administration. Sectionalism was becoming a major issue in American life, as the South and the Northeast developed fundamental differences over such issues as tariffs and the extension of slavery.

Natchitoches Parish was the scene of its own Trail of Tears when, in May, 1835, the Caddos responded to continuing encroachments on their lands and lives by signing an agreement at the Caddo Indian Agency on a bluff overlooking Bayou Pierre,

ceding their lands to the United States. They agreed to move out of the United States "never to return to live, settle, or establish themselves as a nation or community" within its confines. They received for their lands \$30,000 in goods and horses, and \$50,000 in money, paid over five years. They departed first for Texas to join Choctaw relatives, then later, relocated in Oklahoma. With their exodus from the parish, a highly significant segment of Natchitoches history was partially closed--but only partially so. The Caddos of Oklahoma to this day cultivate close ties with the area and consider it their spiritual homeland, and many native Americans with various tribal backgrounds remained in the region or returned to it, continuing to to enrich its cultural life.

The period from 1815-1835 witnessed a large scale transition to cotton. After the War of 1812 ended in 1815, the cotton boom took on increased vigor. As mentioned earlier, population increases in both the general population and slaves were about 100 percent in the decade from 1810 to 1820. The United States experienced a major depression in 1819, but Louisiana's population still increased by 40 percent between 1820 and 1829. This rate of growth was smaller than before and smaller than it would be in the expansive 1830s, reflecting the effects of the Panic of 1819. Still, farmers continued to migrate to Louisiana, and Louisiana planters remained optimistic and continued to expand their cotton lands and purchase slaves. The slave population increased by 59 percent between 1820 and 1830. One of the reasons for the optimism was that cotton still respectable prices on world markets. Cotton prices fluctuated

between 12 and 17 cents per pound in the years 1810 to 1824 but declined somewhat in the latter 1820s. Nevertheless, Louisiana continued to be caught up a cotton fever that also consumed Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi.

Interestingly, at a time when cotton averaged about 11 cents per pound, still profitable but not spectacular by any means, a Northern passenger on a Mississippi River steam boat was informed by planters from Natchitoches that "they could not get enough boats to bring the cotton down the Red." The steamboat age, ushered in 1807 when Robert Fulton demonstrated a steamboat navigating the Hudson River, added to the cotton mania. Steamboats were soon churning down the Mississippi, and by the 1820s, regularized traffic to Natchitoches had commenced. Marketing was greatly facilitated. Before the steamboat's introduction to the area, trade with New Orleans, the major port, had been overland or by cumbersome rafts, flatboats, keelboat, and barges. By the late 1820s and 1830s, a few planters had their own steamboat landings along the river; these would proliferate to dozens in the 1840s and 1850s.

In contrast to the somewhat static 1820s, the decade of the 1830s was extremely dynamic, if volatile. Louisiana's general population showed a 63 percent increase. The rate of increase among the enslaved population was slightly less than during the previous decade because of restrictive laws passed by the state after the 1831 Nat Turner slave insurrection in Virginia. The laws remained in effect until repealed in 1834, and did effectively prohibit the importation into the state by

professional traders. The motivation behind the legislation was to prevent the entry into the state of potential rebels.

Generally high prices for cotton prevailed in decade, especially in the period from 1833 to 1835, ranging from 14 to 17 cents per pound, on average. Louisiana, although not Natchitoches, developed a dual plantation economy in the 1830s as both cotton and sugar production expanded. For planters, the period was intensely market-oriented, speculative, affluent, and inflationary, especially in the middle years of the 1830s.

Although not confined to this period, significant demographic shifts took place in Natchitoches between 1815 and 1835--the influence of Indians was further diminished by the Caddoan removal in 1835. Roman Catholic Creole influence, including creoles of French, Spanish, and mixed race ancestry, was diminished because of the sheer volume of migrants into the area from the United States, many of them with a Protestant Scots-Irish, ethnic background. African-American slaves, also largely Protestant, were brought in through purchases and accompanying the Anglo-American migrants. In Natchitoches, the influx of Americans and African-American laborers [rather than African and Franco-African slaves] can be partially gauged in changes in surnames, first names, and descriptions in church records, succession records, and deeds. About 1818-1819, many references to "English Negroes" [a local term for English-speaking slaves born in the United States and previously owned by Americans] appear.

Part Two:

PRUDHOMMES AND ASSOCIATED FAMILIES

1815-1835

I. FAMILY DEVELOPMENTS, 1815-1835

Both the economic fortunes and the size of the family of Emanuel and Catherine Prudhomme expanded during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Their son Jean Pierre Baptiste was born in 1785, followed by Henriette in 1786, Louis Narcisse in 1788, Marie Adele and her twin Marie Adeline in 1800, Pierre Phanor in 1807, and a stillborn infant in 1798. Daughter Henriette died at the age of twenty, and Marie Adele at fifteen, both young brides.

Emanuel Prudhomme lived until May 13, 1845, succumbing at the age of eighty-three. His wife Catherine Lambre Prudhomme, daughter of Jean (Jayme) Lambre and Marie Poissot and born March 27, 1767, died August 4, 1848. For several decades before their deaths, Bermuda--the plantation they had founded--had been run by their son Pierre Phanor, who remained at the homeplace with his wife Susanne Lise Metoyer, whom he had married in January of 1835. The two elder sons, Jean B. and Louis Narcisse, had both received plantations on the river from their parents.

In the period between 1815 and 1835, the plantation called Bermuda flourished. As Emanuel Prudhomme's cotton acreage

increased, so did the slave labor force required to render it profitable. In 1810, he reported owning 53 slaves; in 1820, 74. Some of the increase was natural, but the pattern of active buying begun in the 1790s increased. Many of the new acquisitions appear to have been young Africans purchased, or at least baptized as adults, after the 1808 Congressional edict ending the African slave trade. French planters had been dependent upon African imports since the founding of the colony, preferring those from West Africa (Senegal, Gambia, Congo--all often referred to generically as Guinea). Natchitoches planters had no difficulty in continuing to buy young Africans from French traders after the American edict. More will be said about Emanuel's slave force in a later section.

It is also in this period that the LeComtes and Prudhommes form kinship ties.

The only son of Magnolia's founders Ambrose I and Helene was Jean Baptiste LeComte II, a planter and rancher who shared their lives on the family's land grants. Born on June 13, 1786, he died in 1825, the exact date unknown. In his less than twenty years of adulthood, Jean Baptiste married three times. On June 6, 1806, at the age of twenty, he married fifteen-year-old Mary Anne Cephalide Lambre, daughter of Remi Lambre and Susanne Prudhomme. She gave birth to a son, Ambrose II, on June 11, 1807, and she died on January 23, 1811. On December 22, 1814, Jean Baptiste LeComte remarried. His bride was fourteen-year-old Marie Adele Prudhomme, daughter of Emanuel Prudhomme and his wife Catherine Lambre. She too died, almost exactly a year later, perhaps in childbirth. They had a child, who must not

have survived the 1820s. His last wife was Suzette Prudhomme, daughter of Antoine and Marie Lambre Prudhomme. They married in 1824 and Jean Baptiste LeComte II died the following year, the exact date unknown, at the age of thirty-nine.

Meanwhile, Emanuel Prudhomme methodically built up his family's river front landholdings, recognizing the wealth potential of cotton production. After the Panic of 1819, he bought tracts from neighbors and kinspeople who may have been hard-pressed for cash. He also acquired land adjacent to his plantation, including part of Metoyer point, through a propitious exchange with Benjamin Metoyer in 1821. And in 1831, he made a major acquisition on both sides of the river, the Rachal Plantation located between Bermuda and that of Benjamin Metoyer.

He also continued to expand his labor force, increasing it to 96 in 1830. Additional purchases were made in the volatile and expansive early and mid 1830s.

AGRICULTURAL CHANGES, 1815-1835

The major agricultural development affecting the Prudhomme family during the 1815-1835 period was a changeover from subsistence agriculture and small-scale exportation of tobacco to large-scale cotton production for an eager world market. Average export prices for cotton in 1815 were almost unbelievably high, 29.4 cents. In 1817 the average peaked at 33.9 cents, the highest recorded in the antebellum period. The Panic of 1819 reduced this inflated price, but prices remained highly profitable, generally between 10 and 21 cents per pound until the Panic of 1837 sent them plummeting once more. To profit from

these prices, planters hungrily sought more land and more slaves. It is not surprising, therefore, that ambitious planters such as the Prudhommes took advantage of this highly favorable market by expanding both their landholdings and slaveholdings. Cotton was the primary market crop of the Prudhommes and the region after the 1815.

No agricultural census is available for the time frame, nor are succession records for family members. Therefore, details on crop production are not available for the 1815-1835 period. However, a cotton-picking record for the late 1830s will be discussed in the next section.

MIGRATIONS INTO THE AREA, 1815-1835

In the period from 1815 to 1835, Cane River area became even more ethnically diverse with the influx of settlers from the southeastern United States and the Ohio River valley and their different cultural patterns. Many more settlers with Anglo names appear on census roles for the area. On Prudhomme holdings, although slaves with French names still predominated, newly-purchased workers were often African-American (the Franco-African and creole slaves called them "English"). In the next decades they would intermarry and produce a generation of workers with roots both in the Franco-African and African-American cultural traditions.

Thus the slave community of the early nineteenth century contained both French-speaking African and Creole (colony-born) slaves and American ("english") slaves. Again, baptism lists are helpful in learning about the Emanuel Prudhomme's slave

community, which included Antoinette, a "Guinea" slave of twelve, baptized in 1804; Judith, fifteen, and also African-born, baptized in 1804; Louise, twelve-year-old "Guinea" slave, baptized in 1804, godparents, Charles and Francoise; Celestin, "Guinea negro," thirteen-years-old, baptized in 1804, godparents Antoine and Maria Ann; Martin, age seventeen, "Guinea negro," baptized in 1804, godparents, Dominique and Clemence; Bruno Athanase, fifteen, "Guinea negro," baptized 1804, godparents, Guillaume and Clemence. Another African-born child, Louise, twelve, was baptized that same year, and her godparents were Antoine and Marie Louise. The same is true of Jacques, a fourteen-year-old "Guinea negro," whose godparents were Marie and Jacques. Charles (Jacques), another "Guinea negro" baptized in 1804 on Bermuda/Oakland, had as his godparents Charles and Pouponne. Marthe, fifteen, also from the Guinea coast, was in the same baptismal grouping in 1804. Her sponsors were Jean Louis and Manon.

Manon's daughter Francoise, aged two, was baptized in 1804, with godparents Guillaume and Clemence. The November 14, 1804 baptism also included two children of Susanne: Pierre, two years (godparents, Jacques and Marie) and Michel, four (godparents, Jean Baptiste and Annette). The baptism at Emanuel Prudhomme's plantation was presided over by the Priest, P. Pavie. Slaves of Emanuel's brother, Antoine, were also baptized.

In 1806, a mulatto girl, 4 months old, named Marie Celeste was baptized. She was the daughter of Marie Helenore. Along with godparent mulatto Dominique, they were all part of Emanuel Prudhomme's slave community.

finish documenting the slaves present 1800-1835

Although he did so infrequently, occasionally Emanuel Prudhomme emancipated a slave. Such was the case in May, 1826, when he emancipated from slavery his servant Marie Fon, about fifty, for and in consideration of "good and faithful services...."

DISCUSS SOME "AMERICAN" SLAVES SUCH AS SOLOMON WILLIAMS,
ETC. HERE

BUILDINGS AT BERMUDA/OAKLAND, 1815-1835

BUILDING OF THE BIG HOUSE

The current Prudhomme family believes that the present Big House is the second on the site. Mayo Prudhomme said that Emanuel Prudhomme first started farming in the area that is now Oakland in about 1785, and that the original home site was taken by the river. As a safeguard, the present house was built at a greater distance from the river and constructed on pillars. It is difficult to determine exactly when the house was built. The only early plat available to date does not show structures and

dates to the reconfirmation of a land claim to 700 acres, including the house site and park property, in January, 1816. However, it is clear from other records that the family resided in the area since at least the 1790s. The Big House was probably built after the reconfirmation, between 1818 and 1821.

SUMMATION

SECTION THREE: THE MATURATION OF PLANTER SOCIETY

1835-1861

Part One: The Setting

I. GENERAL HISTORICAL CONTEXT

With the acquisition of a vast new territory in the west after the Mexican War, the question of the status of slavery in the new territories arose once more. Southern agriculturalists, who had enthusiastically supported the war and expansionistic politics, believed that their right to take their institutions, including slavery, into the new territories, was protected by the Constitution. This would become a major decisive issues in the years to follow. The Northeast, which was in the beginning stages of an industrial revolution, wanted high protective tariffs. Southern planters and farmers, who had to sell their crops in an unprotected market, felt that it would be economically ruinous if they were forced to buy manufactured goods in a protected market. This, too, would become a divisive issue. The years from 1850 to 1860 were filled events that drew the nation closer and closer to war. Among the events that polarized the sections were the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the attack on Harper's Ferry by John Brown, the Dred Scott decision, and, of course, the election of 1860, in which a darkhorse candidate, Abraham Lincoln, of the newly-formed Republican Party [no relation to the Republican Party of the 1800-1828] was elected. The Prudhommes were greatly affected by

these national events, and by the increased sectionalism that was tearing at the seams of the national fabric.

[insert information from 1865 letters as well as info
about removing sons from northern schools after
compromise of 1850]

add info on change of schools after comp. of 1850

Although the period from 1835 to the outbreak of the American Civil War continued to exhibit an obsession with cotton, Cane River was perhaps less dependent upon King Cotton than many regions of the cotton South. Planters of the Cane River region continued to be somewhat diversified through the 1840s, and even in 1860 many still ran large numbers of cattle, sheep, and swine in their unimproved woodlands.

The 1860 agricultural census, as well as successions of the latter 1850s, show, however, that a major transition had occurred by that date. By 1860 plantation crops were almost exclusively cotton and corn, the latter used as feed for livestock. Tobacco and indigo production had almost ceased. The primary work animal used for plowing was now the mule rather than the oxen, although smaller farmers still used horses and oxen.

[insert brief summary about Prudhomme extended family and
Cane River agriculture here]

With cotton came prosperity for some; ruination for others. Larger planters, such as the Prudhommes benefitted most. As a result of their increased prosperity, they built bigger and more luxurious houses, barns, stables, and quarters, although rarely on the scale found along the Mississippi. Smaller, non-slaveholding farmers were more numerous in the parish, but they wielded far less social, political, and economic power than large planters such as the Bermuda Prudhommes and Magnolia LeComtes. pf.

The period from 1830 to 1860 was an exciting era for planters on the Cane. The area bustled with activities. Dozens of plantations with big houses similar to those of Cherokee, Beau Fort, Oakland, and Magnolia adorned both banks. River boats made regular appearances along the river, and bateaus and ferries constantly transported people and animals across the river. Visiting back and forth was incessant among all racial, ethnic, and class groups. The area was largely self-sufficient and self-contained, although the more affluent made regular trips to Natchitoches or even new Orleans for business and social reasons or on major religious occasions.

People of Cote Joyeuse and the Natchitoches plantation country in general were strongly impacted by technological changes in the four decades before the Civil War. Early gins and presses were labor-intensive but not particularly dangerous. Horse-powered, screw-type cotton presses similar to that still at Magnolia were in operation until the late 1840s and 1850s, when the larger planters converted to more complex, expensive, and dangerous steam-driven equipment. Like sugar production, cotton production became semi-industrial. A slave was killed in the

steam cotton press at Magnolia in 1856. The Prudhommes at Oakland sent a worker in 1854 to be trained in engineering. Both incidents were signs of changing times.

After the 1834 repeal of restrictions on slave importations to Louisiana, the slave trade was reinvigorated. The cotton fever was all consuming in the frenetic mid 1830s, with prices averaging 17 cents per pound in 1835. Prices remained favorable through 1838. The Panic of 1837 touched off a decline in cotton prices in 1838, but profits could still be made at an average of 8.6 cents per pound.

The Panic's most serious effects on Louisiana's economy was be experienced in the 1840s. The rate of population growth slowed. It was 16 percent less among the general population, and dropped by 9 percent among the enslaved population. In 1842, cotton brought only 6.2 cents per pound, and in 1844, it plunged to 5.9 cents, below production costs. With prices at an unprofitable level, cotton farmers reduced production accordingly, and in 1849, Louisiana lagged behind other Lower South states in total cotton production.

These economic doldrums were lifted in the 1850s. Migrations to the state resumed, but in a more measured and orderly fashion. Despite fluctuations, cotton prices remained at generally profitable levels throughout the decade of the 1850s. Production increased dramatically. By the late 1850s, many large planters began to speculate in slaves, and slave prices skyrocketed. Large planters in Natchitoches Parish were among those who made frequent purchases of workers in the 1850s. In the

last several years before the outbreak of war in 1861, Louisiana cotton and sugar planters prospered as never before.

With the transition to cotton and its generally high prices throughout the antebellum period, numerous population changes took place. Americans continued to arrive in droves, many with slaves. French and Creole planters also dramatically increased their slaveholdings to compete successfully in gang-produced cotton production. With the influx of other ethnic groups, the French influence on Cane River was challenged but remained strong. Although the position of large Creole planters had declined some during the hard times of the early 1840s (following the Panic of 1837), the numbers of Creole small planters and free-holding farmers increased dramatically, and their homes and farms spread throughout the region.

*Defence
Creole*

Part Two:

PRUDHOMMES AND ASSOCIATED FAMILIES
1835-1861

I. FAMILY BACKGROUND

A. GENEALOGICAL INFORMATION

Jean Pierre Emanuel Prudhomme is rightly regarded as the founder of Bermuda/Oakland. Born in 1762, married in 1784, and dying in 1845, he lived a long and productive life.

give biogr. info.

His wife Catherine Lambre was responsible for much of the furnishings and garden design at Oakland, influenced by her observations in Paris on an 1821 trip the couple made. It was on that trip that their portraits were painted and many of the older furnishings were purchased. She planned and supervised the laying out of formal parterre gardens, edged in English boxwood, and her husband had planted many of the majestic oaks that still adorn the plantation landscape.

By the mid thirties, both were in their late sixties and early seventies; much of the day to day planning and operation

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1835

of the plantation was left to Emanuel and Catherine's children, particularly the future master of Bermuda/Oakland, Phanor Prudhomme I.

PUT SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF PHANOR AND WIFE SUSANNE LISE HERE. ✓

C. FAMILY AND PLANTER LIFE AT BERMUDA/OAKLAND, 1835-1861

1. RELIGION
2. RECREATION
3. EDUCATION
4. OTHER

II. LAND ACCUMULATION, 1835-1860

The period between the founding of Bermuda/Oakland Plantation in 1821 and death in were filled with vision and building-- expansion of the family and of a new plantation. continued to accumulate land, much of it town lots and unimproved lands bought for speculative purposes. ✓

III. BUILDINGS AND LANDSCAPE FEATURES AT BERMUDA/OAKLAND, 1835-1860

Many of the buildings at Bermuda/Oakland Plantation were built between ; additionally, a townhouse in Natchitoches was constructed in the same period.

A. THE BIG HOUSE

1. LANDSCAPING AROUND THE BIG HOUSE

(a) ORIGINS OF THE FORMAL GARDEN

Family members believe that the formal garden and basic landscaping around the Big House was begun by Emanuel and Catherine Prudhomme, and continued by his son Phanor I and his wife Suzanne Lise. Kenneth, Mayo, and Vivian Prudhomme were told by their father Alphonse II that the formal beds were originally outlined with boxwood. The boxwood edging eventually died, and bottles which had collected in the wine cellar were used to replace the boxwood edging. It is possible that the formal garden was planned in the early 1820s. In 1821 Emanuel and Catherine had their portraits painted in Paris where they no doubt viewed many gardens. They may have tried to replicate one in the front yard of their own plantation residence which was under construction about that time. A 1920s description of the garden mentions only the boxwood, suggesting that the bottle edging was added fairly recently. That article, based on family members' information, gives credit to Madame Catherine Lambre Prudhomme for beginning the formal garden.

OAKS BEHIND THE HOUSE

Family lore states that the oak alley in front of the house was begun very early. In the early 1920s a writer relates that the "long avenue of oaks ... were brought by Emanuel Prudhomme from the southern coast of Mississippi one hundred years ago...." A 2 January 1839 entry in a plantation general reveals that 58 oaks were planted in the "Savanne" [Savannah?]. Some of the large oaks that still survive behind the Big House may be among these, although Kenneth Prudhomme believes that the area referred to as a savannah was nearer the Big Lake.

B. DOCTOR LEVEQUE'S HOUSE

The structure known by the Prudhomme family as the doctor's house was long occupied by physician-planter Dr. J.A. Leveque.

[Insert biographical information
about Leveque here]

Several references are made to the doctor and the house in the journals of the early 1860s. For example, a notation for February 14, 1862, reads, "Make plank fence to Doctors Yard." Mayo Prudhomme believed that the cypress and bousillage-constructed section of the Leveque house was built in the antebellum period but doubts that the barn and grist mill were that early.

C. BLACKSMITH SHOP

The blacksmith's shop, now demolished, was located to the north

of the Big House, in what was the original right-bank descending gin yard [there was another gin yard, residence, and work complex on the other side of the river]. Mayo Prudhomme remarked, "You can still find slag out there. Ken had some pictures of ...the old shop." The photograph shows a shop that was located in the antebellum gin yard and appears to have features consistent with antebellum construction.

D. SMOKE HOUSE/NEW MULE BARN

The structure called both the new mule barn and the smoke house is a classic example of the changing functions of plantation buildings. The family believes that the basic structure was an antebellum smoke house. Its purpose was changed from that of a smoke house to a mule barn after the old mule barn burned in the late 1920s; at that time there was a greater need for stalls for mules than for a huge smoke house.

Kenneth Prudhomme observed that "Paw-Paw, my daddy [Alphonse Prudhomme II], said it was a smoke house when he was little. Right in here, in this stall--behind that, you see? That was the doorway into the smoke house. How the thing was built, I don't know. There's some old poles (I assume they're ash) in the very top of this building that Pop said they used to hang meats from.

postholes
Its mighty big for a smoke house."

It is documented that in the 1860s, 28-30 hogs were butchered at one time, so a large smoke house was necessary during periods in which the plantation supplied rations to a large worker population.

E. SQUARE CRIB

for white & Hominy Corn. Cut including negroes Potatoe [sic] *
ground & Bottom over Grandma's lane." Grandma is Madam Benjamin
Metoyer. Another quarters was locataed on the right bank. *sp*
Ante-bellum references suggest that many of the slaves were
quartered across the river, as well as "in the yard."
In the flush latter fifties and 1860-61, many cabins
were torn down, moved, or re-built.

It appears that house servants lived "in the yard," behind the
house. A February, 1862, entry refers to the fact that the
slaves covered "Cabin in Yard," yet in the same sentence, it is
noted that ploughing took place "in the quarter" and that the
trash gang cleaned drains "in quarter." There is clear
differentiation between the quarter and the cabin in the yard.
Later the same month, the overseer makes a note that hands "work
on Chimney of Cabin in yard," not in the quarters.

It appears that the servant's cabins were of better construction.
A March, 1862, entry in the Plantation Journal states that
"Severin & Joseph putting up brick wall in the Servant house."
This is the only reference to brick walls.

An example of the construction taking place on in the early 1860s
appears in April, 1862, when it is noted that "Solomon [Wilson]
carpenter took possession of his cabin." This structure, I
believe, would have been one of those located near the house and
carpenter's shop.

The quarters' main function was to provide housing for
enslaved workers and their families. The quarters also served as
the seat of internal governance. Here slave community leaders
met to discuss common problems and to devise appropriate

strategies. Courtship and marriage generally took place here. Here workers used their free time for domestic production--of foodstuffs, furniture, clothing, tools, and toys for their own use. Slave archaeology will no doubt provide us with fascinating information on the lives of workers from materials uncovered at cabin sites or discarded in nearby wells and cisterns.

Better
phrasing
needed

In the quarters, slaves forged their own institutions--their families, kinship networks, recreation, and religious values and practices. The quarters was in every sense the heart of the plantation slaves' private world.

In the quarters, one of the best rooms or cabins--often larger and at the head of the first row--would be occupied by the driver and his family. In , John Hellaire was head driver. The personal servants and craftsmen were certainly housed in the brick quarters, along with some but not all of the field workers.

✓

J. BRICK KILN AND YARD

What brick quarters? must be confusing Oakland/with Magnolia

I have not been able to locate the site of the brickyard and kiln either through documents or oral histories. On July 7, 1862, a note records, "Preparing Brick yard." Other references speak of a brick kiln. The brickmaking operation was probably not large for many bricks were purchased. However, the plantation did have a full-time brickmason, , in .

✓

K. SAWMILL

The Prudhommes operated a lucrative sawmill in the Cypress area

during the 1830s-1870s. References abound, but the current family has no knowledge of it. It appears that they operated a small revenue-producing sawmill in the hills at least by the 1830s. Translated from the French, a March 10 entry in Phanor Prudhomme's 1837 journal mentions that he brought 42 cypress posts and 3,950 feet of planks to Natchitoches, presumably to sell. (1837 journal, vol. 2, UNC, 10 March entry). a1838 journal entries mention that sixteen slaves were sent to make shingles in the Cypress swamp, presumably at the sawmill. (Entries for January 15 and 16, 1838.)

L. GINS

By 1860, Bermuda/Oakland had at least three gins in use, one across the river, and two on the Big House side. The latter two are distinguished in the records as the Old Gin, perhaps the one which oral history places near the road, to the north of the Big House; and the New Gin.

The Old Gin, according to oral history, burned during the Federal Retreat in spring, 1864 (Oral Testimony of Kenneth Prudhomme). The New Gin was constructed in 1859 and 1860, as documented in numerous references in the 1860 Record. For example, a January 14, 1860 reference by overseer Seneca Pace stated that cotton was hauled from the "New Gin" to the "Mule Gin," the latter being a mule barn. On February 26, 1860, Pace noted that "Mill hands work on New Gin framing Engine house [,] work brick for foundation." By March 13, workers had set the engine in place at the New Gin, and brickwork was finished at the New Gin on the 16th. Notes for April 11 and 16

show that three men were used to construct a flue, and 390 barrels of cement were required to build the engine room's chimney (at a cost of \$42.99) at the New Gin (1860 Record, 13 March, 1860, p. 12; Quarterly Inventory, p. 5; 11 April, 1860, p. 17, UNC). The engine at the New Gin was apparently used to operate a corn mill. On June 19, 1860, Pace observed: "Start Engine & Felton Corn Mill [...] Perform good. Started by Hendricks & Bates." [Ibid.] On July 21, 1860, three men continued to work on the New Gin, laying a brick pillow for the gin shaft. During the peak of the picking season, daily yields of picked cotton were stored in the Old Gin's receiving room. [September 18, 1860 entry]. On September 27, Pace recorded that the flue was finished, and the engine and pump started at the New Gin, performing very well. On October 1, he noted that he had ginned and pressed twenty-five bales that day. And on November 1, he praised the performance of the gin and the new hand who was running it. With the ginning season almost over, on December 8, hands were used to fence off the New Gin with split rails. An entry for January 15, 1861 mentions moving cotton bales "from gin to old gin." And a February 16 mentions moving cotton from gin to old gin "for shipping"[presumably because the old gin was close to the river]. These are among many such references in the journals during the 1860s which indicate that the old gin and the new gin existed at the same time.

The present Prudhomme family has been told that the site of the old gin was to the north of the house close to where the fishing camp was later located.

by
Whor

Mayo Prudhomme: "The pre-Civil War gin site was back over here north of the Big House...Ken said he remembered plowing out there with the tractor one day and turning up these butts of charcoal timber. He said something to our dad about it, and our dad said, "Oh, I believe that's where the old gin was that was burned during the Civil War."

M. SEEDHOUSE

The seedhouse is mentioned January 17, 1861, and another citation stated that the seedhouse was covered January 29, 1861. I don't know whether or not this is the present seedhouse.

(move seedhouse information from another place
in manuscript)

N. SHOWER HOUSES

According to Kenneth Prudhomme, shower houses or weather houses were simply small enclosed buildings out in the fields where the picked cotton could be placed quickly (and the workers could take shelter) during a sudden shower. An 1861 journal kept by overseer Seneca Pace mentions working on a weather house at Sandy Ridge on Jan. 9; on Jan. 11, he mentioned that his workers "finish Shower houses other side." Numerous references are made in an 1867 Plantation Journal kept by J. Alphonse Prudhomme concerning shower house repairs (Jan. 25) (Jan. 31). An entry for Feb. 4, 1867, "...commenced shower house cut at lake end" gives some indication of location of one shower house.

O. NURSERY

We do not know its location, but a plantation the size of Oakland would have had a nursery building, a child-care unit,

often consisting of a simple cabin and fenced yard. It was generally staffed by older female slaves no longer capable of field work.

P. PIGEON HOUSES

Pigeonnieres or dove-cotes were common plantation buildings, especially among French planters. They were generally hexagonal frame structures, some with brick bases. Two have survived at Oakland, and one of these is probably in its original location. These structures were used to raise pigeons for home consumption, but the bottom portion of the dove-cote was always used for storage, as well as to house often untidy pigeons. A March, 1862 entry states, "Cleaning Pigeons houses...never seen so much trash," and in April, it is noted that "bagging [was put] in Pigeon house." And in May, a worker, Noel, "has taken 40 Bags out of the Pigeon house to put in peas...."

Q. PLANTATION BELL AND TOWER

The plantation bell called workers to the fields and was also used to signal workers and other plantation residents in emergencies such as fires. The bois d'arc tower deteriorated through the years to the point that it could not be saved, but the family still owns the plantation bell. The bell and tower remained in place at least until the 1950s.

R. SLAVE HOSPITAL

Oakland had a building, about which we know little, that had the express purpose of serving as a slave infirmary. At it was staffed with at least one full-time nurse, and doctors were

??

consulted regularly. A slave infirmary or hospital was highly desirable not only for effective and sanitary treatment of the sick, but also to isolate contagious slaves from the general population. Slave hospitals had separate rooms for the care of sick and contagious patients and those who were giving birth or recovering from deliveries. The former were referred to as "sick rooms" and the latter as "lying-in rooms."

A plantation as large as Bermuda ^{? verb} to have a roomy, well-crafted hospital. Maintaining health was a continuous concern of Cane River owners and slaves. In addition to the medical care provided by owners and physicians, slaves themselves relied heavily on their own midwives or "granny women" [herbalists], both in crisis and for preventative treatments such as seasonal teas.

(add reference to antebellum hospital
BIOGRAPHICAL INFO ABOUT NURSES

S. LANE

In the antebellum period, major roads bisected the plantation on each side of the river. It was wide enough for wagons to traverse, led to the fields and levees and river road, and separated the gin yard from the orchards, quarters, and family residences. Vestiges ~~remain~~ of this lane remain on park property.

T. STABLE

Several references are made in the journals to a stable. A January 7, 1860 entry refers to the workers hauling their own corn to the stable during their Saturday free time.

A plantation of Oakland's size would have one or more stables for horses and mules. Scattered references in the Plantation Journals do attest to that fact, but I have found no evidence as to where these structures were located. A typical reference just mentions sending a large amount of fodder to the "Stable" on February 1, 1862. The old mule barn which burned in 1927 may have been the stables.

U. CARRIAGE HOUSE

??
!! Information / date
missing

V. EARLY ORCHARDS

Many scattered references to fruit trees appear in the Prudhomme records from the 1830s on. For example, in the 1861 Plantation Journal kept by overseer Seneca Pace mentions on February 24 that "Vegetation appears...Peach tree Bloom....Elum [sic] tree fruiting out blooms...Clover grows."

Any
note
inform
at
this

W. FENCES

?
Data
missing

X. CEMETERY

The black cemetery on Oakland land near Bayou Brevelle was there in the 1860s according to a few scattered references in the journals. However, in April, 1862, Phanor Prudhomme reported that "All hands howing corn over river--howed to the cemetery cut." Does this suggest that there was another cemetery across the river, perhaps the site of the 1867 St. Paul's brush arbor burial ground?

Would be
nice to include
the
reference

IV. AGRICULTURE AT OAKLAND, 1835-1861

1. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

The 1830s were volatile but generally good years for agriculture. Prices

The 1840s were generally hard times for planters. The Panic of 1837 was severe, and its effects lingered throughout the decade. Some planters went out of business when cotton prices dropped to 4 1/2 cents per pound in 1842 and 1844, well below the cost of production. Others, like the Prudhommes economized and rode out the hard times. They probably relied heavily on their stockraising operations during the years of poor cotton prices; these operations included the ranch and the woodlands of Oakland, where sheep, hogs, and horned cattle free-ranged. It is significant too that in the 1840s, Prudhomme was using a combination of draft animals. Oxens had not been entirely replaced with mules. And the gin house had probably not yet converted to steam. This fiscal conservatism makes sense during a period of recovery from a major depression. Cotton Prices rose to acceptable levels by 1849 and stayed at profitable levels throughout the decade of the 1850s.

The decade 1850-1860 was the hey-day of Oakland in wealth generated by agricultural production. Although cotton prices fluctuated, on the average they were high. The gin was converted to steam in the decade and the result was pound bales of cotton reported in September, 1860, based on the previous year's crop. These huge yields in the latter 1850s were repeated

throughout the South. In 1859, for example, Southern cotton planters, farmers, and enslaved workers produced a phenomenal crop of 4,861,292 bales of cotton. Enslaved workers used in production of this impressive crop numbered about , although not all were of appropriate ages to have directly participated. The roster of work animals shows fewer oxen and more mules as draft animals. Cotton was clearly the premier market crop, but bushels of Indian corn were produced, the bulk of which would be consumed by work animals on the combined plantations and the family and workers. It is significant that the Prudhommes were fully into the one-crop economy by 1860, unlike some of their smaller, more diversified neighbors. (check for accuracy) ✓

Except for corn production and some wool for their own textile production, the family had no other agricultural production to report, not even sweet potatoes. However, gardens and a sweet potato plot are noted in other documents, sufficient for the family and workers' needs.

It is important to remember that large planters such as the Prudhommes and LeComtes may have dominated the area in terms of economic, political, and social status, but they were never the majority. Most of the area's agriculturalists were farmers and small planters, often of mixed race, with small to medium holdings.

2. CORN

Corn was a major Bermuda crop in the 1830s for local markets as well as for family and livestock consumption. ✓

In 1837 Cane River farmers and planters bought as much as 138 barrels at a time, for prices ranging from \$1.25 to \$1.50 per barrel. (1837 Journal, Vol. 2, p. 7, UNC).

3. COTTON

Cotton, of course, was king. A harvest commencing on September 11 in 1838 produced 327 bales. (Entries for 11 Sept, 1838 and 23 February, 1839, 1838-1839 Journals, UNC).

More information?

In 1860, Magnolia's LeComte was the largest producer of cotton in the parish and the largest slaveholder, but planters such as the Prudhommes on Cote Joyeuse rivalled him.

4. OTHER CROPS

a. PUMPKINS

A pumpkin field was plowed and planted in late March, 1838 (entry for 21 March, 1838 Journal), and sweet potatoes were planted the same day.

b.

IV. LABOR AT OAKLAND, 1835-1861

A. The Bermuda Prudhommes hired Irish work crews in the late 1830s to dig large drainage ditches on both sides of the plantation, 4-6 feet wide, 1 1/2-2 feet deep, and more than 2,000 feet long. (Entry for 6 March 1837, 1837 Journal, Vol. 2, UNC)

B. Evidence from the 1837 journal suggests that the Prudhommes had a sawmill in operation on their Kisatchie land. It appears that, throughout the antebellum period, local whites as well as Prudhomme slaves were employed at the sawmill.

*Black
where
was it*

C. Most of the labor performed at Bermuda/Oakland, however, was that of enslaved workers.

Cotton picking records for 1860 have survived for Oakland Plantation. At Oakland, ninety slaves picked cotton during the last full week of August, 1860. The top picker was Andrew, 24, who picked 335 pounds and averaged 248 for the week. With greater dexterity, women were generally the equal of men in picking, and the second highest number of pounds on a single day, 330 pounds, was picked by Rosalie, 47, early twice the age of Andrew. Among the top pickers were four women over forty. Output per worker was, on the average, much higher in 1860 than it had been earlier--which may have been due to a change in seed varieties.

The Prudhomme extended family was somewhat unusual, even among Cane River French slaveowners, in the degree of economic independence they allowed their slaves. It was not unusual for

southern planters to allow slaves to cut wood on their time off for their owners to sell. Prudhomme slaves produced small crops of their own, both for subsistence and for sale, as well as owning and free-ranging small amounts of their own livestock. These activities allowed some slaves to accumulate some capital with which they started their lives as freedpeople after the Civil War. As early as 1837, Phanor Prudhomme I kept an account of corn he sold for his slaves Lindor, Philippe, Gustin, Alexis, Jacot, Zack, Malingo, Baptiste l'Anglais, Antoine, Gregoire, Charles, Alexandre, Helaire, Louis, Augustin, and others. (see entries for March 6, 14, and pages 1 and 7, month not stated, 1837. Prudhomme Journal for 1837, Vol. 2, UNC)

VI. LIVESTOCK AT OAKLAND, 1835-1860

1. Agricultural census records indicate that

2. In the tabulation for the year 1861, the overseer mentioned having on hand on 9 Feb. 1861 114 head of "swamp cattle" mostly in ^{space} the pasture, and 44 of them oxen. The swamp was near the pasture. On 21 July, he noted that 10 head of cattle were brought from the vachery,, In October, a Texas beef cattle "died of sickness". *1861 Journal (Cotton Plantation Record and Account Book).

It is clear that free-range herding was an important economic outlet for the Bermuda Prudhommes throughout the ante-bellum period. In his 1837 journal, Phanor Prudhomme I recorded that on July 31, he had ninety-seven sheep and seven "little ones," "not counting the two being fattened up." [translation from French], p. 4, 1837 Journal, Vol. 2) On July 9 of the following year, Prudhomme reported ninety-four "fat sheep" as well as "thirteen small ones." (1838 Journal, 9 July, p. 6). A sheep shearing was held on March 23, 1838. By November 18, the flock had increased to "116 sheep--small and big." (23 March, 1838 18 November Entry, 1838 Journal, UNC)

[add info about 1840s and 1850s]

The 1838 journal entry for March 16, 1838 recounts the marking of Oakland cattle. In addition to those of the Prudhomme family, cattle belonging to slaves were also marked, including 2 females for Bysainte, 2 females for "L'Anglais", 4 females for Jean Louis, 1 male for Petit Louis, 1 male for Jacot, 1 male for the "widower Charles", and 1 female for Dorcino.

Further evidence that the Bermuda slaves owned and ran their own livestock in the woodlands with that of the Prudhommes is found in the "Inventory of Stock and Implements" for 1860. The overseer, Seneca Pace, noted that when the cattle were rounded up in July for marking and branding, John and Lucy had five head, Auguste, one; Roset, one; Hiliar, two; Bob, one; Solomon [the blacksmith], one; Francois, two; Minique, one; Charles, two; Alexis, one; Dorceno, one; Fanny, one; Audrey, one, with a "total of Negroes Stock mark[ed] & branded" of twenty head. (Plantation

Record for P. Prudhomme Plantation, 1860, page 1, UNC). There are also several references to the "Negroes corn" in the 1860 Record Book. (For example, January 7, 1860 entry refers to the workers hauling their own corn to the stable during their Saturday free time, p. 2; June 2, 1860 entry refers to the workers shelling their own corn, also on a Saturday, p. 27. UNC).

CATTLE-RAISING AT THE TEXAS VACHERIE

VII. TIMBER OPERATIONS

Their Kisatchie Hills sawmill operation became an important source of revenue for the Bermuda Prudhommes in the 1850s.

[ADD INFO HERE]

8 January 1861 entry mentions that men were cutting cord wood at Cypress. (1861 Journal).

VII. CHANGES IN AGRICULTURAL EQUIPMENT USED AT OAKLAND, 1830S-1860S

Journal entries in February, 1838, mention plowing with oxen. Ten plows were in use plowing the corn fields on February 12. (1838 journal, 12 and 26 February). a March 22, 1838 entry remarks upon use of a plow with beaten iron "ears" being put into

service (1838 journal).

Although many references are made to the use of plows to break the ground and till, in 1838, Phanor Prudhomme also describes tilling with pickaxes on April 20 and April 28. {1838 Journal, UNC, p. 2}.

In 1861, references are made to plow teams, such as one on 10 January, 1861, referring to "start 7 ploughs 6 mule teams of 3 mules each on plough." (1861 journal)

VIII. SLAVERY AT BERMUDA/OAKLAND, 1835-1861

Bermuda/Oakland was highly successful partly due to the hard work and business acumen of its founders, owners, and managers. However, that success and resultant affluence could not have been possible if it had not been for the enslaved people who formed the labor force.

In the 1840s and 1850s Bermuda/Oakland had a slave force which ranged between 98 and 7, ¹⁸⁶¹ In 1860, ^(1860 was 145 in Census) it numbered 146. The ancestors of ^{succession document} many of these slaves had, in the eighteenth century, produced tobacco, Indian corn, and perhaps small amounts of sugar cane and indigo. But by 1840 cotton was the premier crop on the region's large plantations such as Oakland. Oakland's slaves engaged in a great variety of tasks, but like most slaves of the American South, most were normally engaged in agricultural production. On the Prudhomme plantation owners and workers concentrated on the cash crop of cotton. Most of the foodstuffs, clothing, equipment, and some of the livestock for the plantation was bought. ✓

Phanor Prudhomme occasionally hired out slaves, such as Nathan, who was "rented" to a Mr. Frederike on the 9th of June, 1838. (1838 Journal, page 6). (other examples) ✓

A. SLAVE OCCUPATIONS

Inventories of slaves from 1840-1860 do not reveal the names of all who worked part or full time in the house, shops, gin, and stables of Oakland, but some were identified. For example, in the period from 1840-1862, Charles was a coach driver for the family. Solomon Wilson, Bob, and Lens were carpenters. Solomon Wilson was mentioned as having received a set of augers, five planes, an adze, and a trimming hatchet on 7 March 1837. (1837 Journal, Vol. 2, p. 3, left.)

Solomon Williams was a blacksmith, as was Philip until he became deranged and was hospitalized in New Orleans.

Marie, Caroline, Nancy, Aimee, Janvier, Johnson, and Edward were ----- ✓

Estate documents in 1850 identify Martha Ann, 30, as the washerwoman. Celeste and Nanette were midwives and nurses in charge of the plantation hospital. Venus was the head cook until the estate sale of 1850 when she was purchased by a non-family member. Ben [Helai] cooked. Lindor, a male in his mid-fifties in 1850, was in charge of weaving, a somewhat unusual assignment for a male slave. Alexis was the head shoemaker, and Joseph was his apprentice. Butler was the brickmason, and Nathan was the painter. Bysainte, in his fifties in 1850, kept tabs on Oakland's cattle, which numbered between 250 and 300, sometimes assisted by Cesaire and Dorcino. Hilaire was the driver. Arsen,

called "Big Belly" in plantation diaries, worked as ginner.

Even in an unpaid labor system, leadership positions carried status in both the owner's estimation and in the eyes of the slave community. House and personal servants such as carriage drivers often had better clothes and housing than field workers. The primary driver during slavery was Helaire, an ancestor of the Helaire clan which has played such an important role in Oakland's histoy. Because of their constant interaction with the owner's family, house servants often developed bonds of affection with the owner they served. Thus individuals such as a cook or carriage driver had high status with the owners, but not necessarily in the field slaves' quarters. A midwife or nurse, however, had high status in the quarters because field workers' health was so dependent upon her. Artisans who worked in the shops came in close contact with the field workers, often lived in the quarters, and had high status both in the Big House and quarters. One such individual was Solomon Williams, mentioned above. Born in 1819 in Virginia, he was to all accounts an extraordinarily inventive craftsmen. After emancipation, his smithing abilities allowed him to negotiate a separate and more favorable contract than the other workers. He was probably the Solomon Williams who created the well drill displayed at Oakland (although it could not have been contrived in 1822, as family lore contends). It is possible that the well drill was constructed by his father, also Solomon Williams, and that the family was bought from Virginia together. One indication that this might be the case comes from his descendants. His great-granddaughter recalled that William Smith, Solomon's son, spoke

only French. If Solomon had been bought as a young adult from Virginia, he would have spoken mostly English at home with his family. However, if he was bought as an infant or child, he would have been reared in the French culture of Natachitoches Parish.

Give more biographical info about Solomon here--
first wife, etc. ✓

In any case, Solomon Williams who remained part of the Prudhomme work force well into the 1880s was an exquisite craftsman whose handiwork can be seen throughout the Big House. He also created the iron crosses retrieved from a Freedmen's Cemetery at Oakland. A marker for his beloved wife Laide is among them. They both died in the late 1880s, but their children, including Eugene Williams, continued to work at Oakland.

Slave craftsmen and skilled workers appear to have been encouraged to innovate at Oakland, and the Prudhommes were willing to invest in their training. For example, a letter of 1854 reveals that Oakland worker Raynond was receiving training as a engineer for the steam cotton gin under John B. Clarkson at Union Plantation. After two months, Clarkson sent Phanor Prudhomme a progress report:

I have seldom met with a Negro who shewed more anxiety to learn everything pertaining to a Steam Engine... [He is] cheerful, attentive, and obedient in all things, and I have no hesitation in saying that with a little more practice he will make a competent and careful engineer.

[Give biographical information on Raymond here]

Basketmakers were very important on a cotton plantation. A June 20, 1862 entry in the Plantation Journal kept by Phanor Prudhomme noted, "Sent the wagons to mill to get oak lumber for Thibaut to make baskets." Another Prudhomme basket maker during slavery and after was Claiborne, who became Clement Claiborne after emancipation. He continued to make high quality baskets for planters of the area well in the 1920s. He would serve as basketmaker at Melrose when he was in his seventies and eighties. His sons and grandsons worked for the Prudhommes and Cloutiers as tenants but also as basketmakers, as revealed by his descendants and Prudhomme family member.

(here give family lore about his origins)

named after Clement Claiborne - 1st owner Alberta Kinsey - Partner
FIELD WORKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Give brief biographies here

B. FAMILY AND DOMESTIC LIFE OF OAKLAND SLAVES, 1835-1861

1. SOCIALIZING

Loss of autonomy is a demoralizing and destructive aspect of slavery. In a world where freedom of movement, action, and speech is extremely limited, every opportunity to exercise some

initiative for oneself or one's family is important. It appears that the Oakland Prudhommes were fairly lenient in this regard, allowing slaves to visit friends and relatives along Cane River, providing or allowing dances, marriage ceremonies, baptisms, funerals, and occasional church services. Children were not generally required to work in the fields. *Handwritten: 13-20 for 1860* Workers were allowed to have their own gardens, generally working for themselves on Saturday afternoons and Sundays, raising sweet potatoes, watermelons, turnips, and other vegetables. They were allowed to earn money cutting wood, and to own their own livestock. Some workers were trusted to go long distances on assignments. For example, Prudhomme's men Azeanor and Favron in 1860 were sent to Texas to bring back horses and mules for Oakland. Workers were allowed to travel to other plantations for their own purposes on days off. (May 25, a Sunday, in 1862, "Newell went to Mr. Georges to get a hog from his father Jean Louis.")

Considerable is known About the degree of socializing allowed ✓
Bermuda/Oakland slaves. Surviving records from Oakland Plantation suggests that area slaves were given considerable opportunities to socialize with slaves from other plantations. Large owners would take turns sponsoring Christmas and New Year's balls and summer barbecues.

[GIVE EXAMPLES HERE] *yes* ✓

2. COMMUNITY AND FAMILY STRUCTURE

In the 1840s, '50s, and '60s, Oakland had an old slave community by Lower South standards, since the plantation had

operated at the same site since the late eighteenth century. Many of its workers had colonial ancestors. It exhibited a strong degree of stability, even in the 1840s, which was not a prosperous period for cotton planters. Many marginal planters had to mortgage or even sell some of their slaves in the 1840s, but Prudhomme was not a marginal planter. He, like most large planters of Louisiana, simply stopped buying and tried to hold on to the slaves and other forms of capital they had accumulated in the flush early 1830s. The slave community underwent few changes. Oakland's workers were able to continue to form nuclear families, extend their kinship networks, and build a strong domestic structure.

Records are extensive enough at Oakland to indicate the presence of strong kinship networks by the mid 1840s. Enough data is already available to state that by the 1850s and early 1860s Bermuda/Oakland's slave community had most of its members in nuclear families of a parent or parents residing with their children. Others were part of married couples without children. Most singles had close relatives on the plantation and were not without familial support.

[Give examples here]

yes



In the mid 1840s, and even more so in the expansive and prosperous 1850s, Oakland's slave community was well balanced in terms of gender and age distributions. As far as social stability, Oakland was almost ideal as a slave community. One

SP

third of its members were children beteen 1 month and sixteen, indicating that the community was capable of reproducing itself. Forty-one percent were men and women of prime working and reproductive years, 17-34. And nearly a third (32 percent) were over forty, many of them over fifty, showing that the community had generational depth; several generations were present, and kinship ties were extensive. These provided emotional depth and support in the community. Stable and mature communities, with well-developed kinship networks, were most likely to have the human resources to support members in crisis. As Oakland moved into the earlyy 1860s, however, its aging population probably diminished its economic productivity.

a repeat
p 19 { Oakland, by the 1850s, had most of its membership in nuclear families of a parent or parents residing with their children. Others were part of married couples without children. Most singles had close relatives on the plantation. } repeats on pg 7

All slaves lived in dread of losing family members though sale, transfer, estate division, or death. At Bermuda/Oakland in the 1840-1860 period, a few old slaves, such as Barbe or ^{Source?} wfs 122 in 1836, would be able to recall having been wrenched from their families, kin, and homes in Africa or the Upper South for transport to Louisiana. By the latter antebellum period, however, most of the buying of slaves by the Prudhommes was of local slaves who would still have opportunities to see family members. In the mature phase of community development, families were rarely separated by sale; nor were transfers of great importance.

More threatening to the slave community and individual families was the prospect of death--of owners and slave parents.

Death of a primary owner sent ripples of dread throughout a slave community because it could mean separation of family members through estate sales or partition. The _____ settlement of _____ estate caused some slaves to be removed from _____, but they remained in the general area. {give examples here}

3. SLAVE RELIGION

A December 1838 journal entry mentioned the baptism of ten of the workers' children, (19 Dec. entry, 1838 journal)

[add much more here]

4. SLAVE RECREATION

January 1, 1861 entry by overseer mentions "Holliday with hands Gave Ball last nite Dance all nite to Day all Day plenty of Neighbors Negroes good conduct not a angryword no braggin of last year crop. On 2nd of January, he noted "Ball Brake at Day Dance all nite Negroes willing to give it up good conduct."

5. FOODWAYS AMONG OAKLAND'S SLAVES, 1835-1861

6. FOLKWAYS AMONG OAKLAND'S SLAVES, 1835-1861

7. HEALTH AND MORTALITY AMONG OAKLAND'S SLAVES, 1835-1861

In Louisiana, and especially in Natchitoches, slave children were more likely to have their families shattered by the early

deaths of one or more parents than by estate division, sale, or transfer. This was a common occurrence because of a high rate of death among young adults as well as infants and children.

High mortality rates existed among whites and blacks in Louisiana. Maintaining health was a continuous concern of Cane River slaves and their owners. Bermuda/Oakland had a building designated as a hospital, and medical doctors were called in routinely on difficult cases. The slaves themselves relied heavily on their own midwives or granny women and root doctors, and snake doctors, both in crisis and for preventative herbal treatments.

Nevertheless, Oakland's slaves were frequently ill, and the mortality rates were especially high among infants and small children. Among the causes of adult deaths listed in the Prudhomme papers for Oakland in the 1840s through the 1860s were consumption, dysentary, bilious fever, typhoid fever, pneumonia, dropsy, sore throat, paralysis [stroke], old age, and bay fever. Children on Oakland died from lockjaw, pneumonia, colds, fever, and inflammation of the bowels. Several infants were stillborn, and miscarriages were occasionally noted. In one case in 1863, Milla was suddenly taken sick and miscarried in the cotton field.

One of the worst outbreaks of typhoid fever occurred in the fall of 1861. The Oakland overseer traced the siege from early August to its peak in mid October, with dozens out sick and several deaths noted. A major epidemical disease that occurred regularly on Louisiana plantations, typhoid fever was

Hy transmitted from one person to another in contaminated water,

food, and feces. Victims suffered with intermittent fevers for two to three weeks. Among those who died, on October 1, 1861, was the hospital nurse, who had worked so diligently to get Oakland slaves through the typhoid crisis, only to herself succumb.

Oakland slaves inventories also indicate common disabilities. In 1850 hernia was probably the most common disability for adult males, afflicting Dorsino, 42; Gustine, 64; and Gregoire, 60. Pomponne, a female, 52, and Little Laisa, 28, were described as "lame," and Rose, 55, had "dropsy" (accumulations of fluid in the chest, abdomen, face, and extremities, probably related to cardiovascular system disease). *sp*

sp Although many Oakland slaves fell ill and died in the unhealthy Louisiana environment (the state had the highest mortality rate in the nation throughout the antebellum period), mortality census scheduled for 1850 suggest that many other slave communitys in Natchitoches Parish had higher rates of mortality.

Common causes of slaves deaths noted in that census were whooping cough and worms for infants and children, and dirteating for slaves of all ages. The latter mysterious condition was rampant in the parish, taking the lives of over twenty slaves ranging in ages from three to sixty, most of them slaves of small owners who may not have provided adequate nutrition (although some experts claim that addictive dirt or clay eating is a cultural phenomenon rather than the result of dietary deficiency). Only one slave from Oakland is recorded as having suffered from this malady.

need to explain this more

Causes of deaths on Bermuda/Oakland were varied. In 1860, a slave man named Toussaint passed away from what was described by Seneca Pace, the overseer, as typhoid pneumonia. [1860 Plantation Record, pg. 34]

Yellow fever epidemics swept the parish in 1852, 1853, 1854, 1858, and 1861 and cholera outbreaks were recorded in 1833, 1849, and 1851. Droughts [that of 1855 was legendary], floods [that of 1849 sent whites and blacks of Riviere aux Cannes to the hills, seeking safe haven, and storms, tornados, and hurricanes [in 1840 and 1844] all had direct impact on the health and well being of all plantation folk.

8. DISCIPLINE/ABUSE

No evidence has been uncovered of worker neglect or abuse in Bermuda's plantation records. Indirect evidence of worker punishment appears to have been suspension of privileges or perhaps being locked in stocks and facing heat, boredom, and ridicule. No evidence of whipping has been uncovered to date. Louisiana's French owners had a reputation among both owners and slaves for being somewhat more lenient than their American counterparts and less inclined to corporal punishment. Physicians' affidavits attest to the fact that some prominent Cane River French planters were occasionally abusive; Louis Sompayrac was so charged in 1828, but no evidence has surfaced that the slaves of Bermuda suffered from mistreatment.

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9. SLAVE HOUSING, CLOTHING AND DIET AT OAKLAND

Since no surviving slave structures can be accurately determined at Oakland, it is impossible to describe slave housing in detail. From journal notations, it appears that they were

cypress cabins, probably single-pen, with stone or brick fireplaces. The 145 slaves of Phanor Prudhomme in 1860 were housed in thirty family dwellings (4.9 people per cabin on average). Journal entries for Oakland show that cabins were being built and repaired regularly.

Diet for Oakland slaves included standard rations of pork, corn meal, and molasses, supplemented by sweet potatoes, turnips, peas from their garden plots and fish and wild game.

[ADD MORE]

Clothing allotments

[ADD]

IX. CONCLUSIONS

SECTION FOUR: CRISIS AND CHANGE

1861-1914

Part One: The Setting

I. GENERAL OVERVIEW

The period from 1861 to 1914 brought serious challenges to the Cane River area, both politically and economically. Some residents benefitted from the changes, some lost, but all struggled.

The repercussions of Secession, the Civil War, and Reconstruction were extremely painful for local planters. The area had many citizens with divided loyalties. Although most Creoles of Color professed loyalty to the Confederacy, many were privately torn, and some, understandably, had Unionist sympathies. Cloutierville, in particular, was a Whig stronghold. Several well-known planters in that area openly opposed the Secession movement. Like other southern Whigs, they were both pro-slavery and pro-Union. People in the nearby hills and forests were divided. Some opposed the war, and some were almost rabidly loyal to the Confederate cause. This group suffered greatly from Jawhawkers who used the excuse of searching for deserters to prey upon poor families. Once the war had begun, most contingents supported the Confederacy and suffered losses both in lives and properties in the civil conflict.

Even while area residents observed war clouds gathering in 1860, the economy appeared healthy. In Louisiana as a whole, profits were high both in sugar and cotton. Production was not seriously disrupted until after the war began in 1861, and even then, a bountiful crop of cotton was produced and harvested. However, Louisiana's economy was dependent upon crops reaching their foreign markets. In the war's early weeks, New Orleans factors took some of the cotton, but Western and Northern buyers soon withdrew from the market, and purchases ceased. The Union blockade of New Orleans further obstructed marketing. The impact of the blockade on the civilian populace of Natchitoches Parish were many, as chronicled in a perceptive paper by local historian Richard Seale. Surplus cotton was stored, but planters had little reason to continue production. A Louisiana planter wrote in 1861 that "all commercial interests are entirely destroyed. Cotton and sugar cannot be sold." These difficulties were compounded after New Orleans fell to Federal forces in 1862, and the occupation of the southern parishes in 1863.

Many Natchitoches men in service throughout the South had already seen the war first hand by 1864. The Red River Campaign of 1864, however, brought the war to the doorsteps of the civilians, as Federal forces swept through the area, engaging Confederate troops at Mansfield, Pleasant Hill, Cloutierville, Monette's Ferry, and on the very grounds of Magnolia Plantation. As invading Federal troops approached the parish, Confederate troops were ordered to destroy cotton that couldn't be hidden, since it would be of use to the enemy. After the

advance of the Union was blocked at Mansfield, Union troops retreated south toward Alexandria, with Confederate troops in pursuit. Natchitoches narrowly escaped destruction, but along the lower Cane River, inhabitants experienced devastation comparable to Sherman's March to the Sea in Georgia. Buildings were torched, livestock killed or confiscated, and any remaining cotton was taken. Plantations on Cote Joyeuse
The Riviere aux Cannes community was directly

?

Magnolia's Big House was burned to the ground, and the family believes that the overseer was killed by Federal troops.

At the end of the campaign, farms and plantations laid in waste. Livestock had perished, was confiscated, or had scattered. Basic food supplies were depleted by the foraging armies. And on many plantations, some or all of the slave workers had fled.

The Civil War's economic effects on Louisiana were enormous and are frequently noted in secondary works on the subject as well as in family documents throughout the state. Less well documented are its effects on both white and black families. Such effects are difficult to determine because many records such as deeds and successions were destroyed [the Courthouse at Alexandria was burned, for example], and in the political chaos that followed the war, many estates weren't probated for a decade.

After 1861, few planters had the time or inclination to keep detailed records concerning their labor forces. Scattered

records can be retrieved and pieced together, however, that reveal black communities that were severely dislocated by the war. Male slaves were frequently impressed by the Confederacy to work in iron works, or on roads, and levees, often many miles away from their families. Planters often moved part or all of their workers to areas such as Texas, where it was believed they would not be confiscated (in fact, LeComte did so, for a short time). The Union conscripted hundreds of former slave husbands and fathers into service when they swept through an area; others joined voluntarily, sometimes followed by fleeing family members who became part of swelling contraband camps. After the war, although they almost universally welcomed freedom from slavery, dislocations continued. The fairly stable family and community life achieved by many enslaved people by the 1850s was effectively destroyed by the war and emancipation. Confused and restless, as well as joyous about their long-awaited emancipation, freedpeople often found it difficult to adjust to their new circumstances, often without the family and community support they had before the war, and without the capital and education with which to build a secure future. The adjustments required of them would be at least as difficult as those faced by former owners.

(Impact on Prudhommes and slaves)

Political Reconstruction in Louisiana, including military occupation, Presidential and Congressional Reconstruction, and Radical Republican rule, lasted until 1876, much longer than in most other former Confederate states. The period was fraught with violence, and Northwestern Louisiana was not immune. A riot at nearby Colfax resulted in a massacre of twenty-five black prisoners; a total of at least sixty-three black males died as a result of the fighting. After 1874, the White League, a Klan-like organization, used terroristic tactics to intimidate black voters and white and black Republican officeholders. In Coushatta, seat of Red River Parish, five white Republicans were killed in 1875. In the Cloutierville area, several white Republicans were killed and a freedman school was burned. In Natchitoches a white Republican state senator was killed in 1871, and a near-riot occurred at the Natchitoches bridge in September, 1878, during a confrontation between whites and blacks over rival political conventions.

The state was officially returned to conservative white Democratic rule in April, 1877, it was the last of the former Confederate states to be "redeemed," as southern whites termed the process. The leaders were referred to as Bourbons, and were, for the most part, the ruling class of the antebellum period. Political and racial unrest would continue to haunt the state throughout the decade.

Economic changes began after the Civil War that would become revolutionary. One of the biggest challenges precipitated to by the Civil War was emancipation of enslaved workers and a transition to free, contracted labor. Confusion reigned among

former owners and freedpeople. In a letter to his sister in July, 1865, Bermuda/Oakland's Phanor Prudhomme stated, "The great uncertainty for us is the future. What are we going to do with the new type of work?"

Labor contracts were negotiated by the Freedmen's Bureau immediately after the war. Freedpeople had problems with the contracts from the beginning. Initially, landless freedpeople viewed sharecropping as better than living in former slave quarters under constant surveillance, working on restrictive contracts, in gang-labor, under an overseer. The contract system was a painful reminder of their former enslavement. In 1867-1868, many freedpeople refused to sign labor contracts. Disappointed when the United States government failed to provide the hoped-for "forty acres and a mule" which they believed was necessary for them to escape impoverishment, they saw sharecropping as an imperfect alternative. They reasoned that farming on shares, on their own assigned plot of land, usually from 20 to 40 acres, would give them more independence. The landlord would provide the capital they lacked--land, mules, seed, plows--and they could do that which they knew well, farming. Many freedpeople saw sharecropping as the first step in accumulating enough money to buy land of their own, their almost universal goal. The system would put them outside the constant supervision of whites, and it had the potential of rewarding unusual initiative and industry.

After much experimentation, on Cane River as elsewhere in the cotton South, a sharecropping and tenant system replaced

contracted labor by the late 1860s and early 1870s. The system, which had serious drawbacks for both landowners and tenants, was adopted because no workable alternatives had been found by either group. By 1870 it was the most common method of contracting for agricultural labor in the South.

The newly adopted system in some cases resulted in the break-up of the quarters-centered black community, with families dispersed to small individual farms carved from the plantations. Under tenancy, the rural store, often a plantation store, or commissary, became a major feature of plantation life. According to southern historian Thomas Clark, the postbellum rural merchant . . .

. . . was all things to his community . . . His store was the hub of the local universe. It was the market place, banking and credit source, recreational center, public forum, and news exchange.

Some of the furnishing merchants who advanced plantation supplies to tenants were not the landowners whose tenants they served. But it was often landowners who operated plantation stores, supplying their own tenants and others in the community, both on the basis of cash and credit. In return for extending credit against the cropper's share of the crop, the furnishing merchant received a lien against that percentage of the crop.

The most usual share crop arrangement was for halves, that is, equal division of the crop between landowner and farmer-tenant. The sharecropper and his family provided the labor, and the landlord provided the land, housing, a mule or mules, tools, and seed. If a sharecropper provided his own tools and work animals, he might be able to command a higher percentage of

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the crop, two-thirds.

Cotton prices were high immediately after the war, but floods, caterpillars, and labor problems made it difficult for southern planters to make a crop. Production therefore was low. Prices for cotton remained high until 1868, then slowly declined as labor problems were resolved with the introduction of share-crop and crop-lein arrangements. Thereafter, production escalated. Cotton dropped to 10 cents per pound in 1876 and remained 10 cents per pound or less throughout the 1880s. During and after the Panic of 1893, it dropped to 5-7 cents per pound, and stayed low. Farmers continued to produce record crops, however, trying to compensate for the reduced prices. With prices often falling below costs of production, sharecroppers were sometimes unable to meet their charges for supplies and became indebted for the next year's crop. Owners who themselves had often borrowed heavily to supply tenants were also caught in the squeeze. One writer has aptly described the years between the end of the Civil War and the start of World War I as "lean and barren." During periods of declining prices for cotton, fewer and fewer tenants were able to make a living under the system. Some opted to leave Louisiana to homestead in Kansas. These were the Kansas exodusters of 1878-1879. Many black farmers from North Louisiana were among them. Then, between the 1890s and 1910, the boll weevil spread from Texas to east of the Mississippi, leaving poverty and destruction in its wake. Louisiana planters had always had to cope with worms and weevils, but the boll weevil's destruction was unprecedented. The boll weevil invasion, coupled with low cotton prices, drove

more tenants from the land--into Southern towns, other types of work, or even to Northern industrial centers.. Long before the displacements caused by mechanization, a farm exodus of both poor blacks and whites had begun; it still continues.

As dismayed cotton planters saw many of their laborers pack up and leave, they were also faced with international competition and declining prices, bringing the Southern farmer "to the brink of ruin" between 1906 and 1913. Louisiana's cotton farmers, along with those of all of the cotton South, were headed toward disaster in 1913. The outbreak of war in Europe postponed the reckoning until 1920.

In addition to political and economic changes, demographic shifts and changes in status occurred in the Cane River plantation country between 1865 and 1914. Creoles lost considerable status and wealth after the Civil War; many lost or sold land in the southernmost portions of the community and retreated to Isle Brevelle, strengthening the monogamous nature of that area, and making it virtually a Creole enclave. During Radical Rule, laws were passed ending or at least limiting legal discrimination against nonwhites, but in a backlash after the end of Radical Rule, African-Americans and Creoles of Color not only lost gains they expected under such legislation, Creoles lost many of the separate-caste privileges they had before the war.

Although the actual numbers of black families may not have risen dramatically by the 1880-1900 period, they were much more visible on the plantation landscape, due to an increase in black workers and tenants who moved in the area from other communities,

and the shift in the position of former slaves to independent workers, usually as tenants but sometimes small freeholders. The agricultural and population census schedules for 1870 show primarily whites and Creoles as neighbors in the community proceeding. By 1900 the agricultural and population census shows dramatic demographic shifts in the immediate environs of Oakland when compared to earlier listings. Although census enumerators did not always proceed from dwelling to dwelling, farm to farm, in a methodical manner, these were their instructions and were generally followed. In 1900, most of the residents in the Bermuda/Oakland area were African-American tenants.

Between 1865 and 1900, many changes took place on the plantation landscape of Cane River. It took decades for the area to recover after the devastation of the war. Planters lost the capital they had invested in slaves, and were unable to get sufficient credit to rebuilding their plantations because of the severe drop in the value of their land and machinery. The plantation landscape was transformed. As a result of the destructiveness of the war and the lack of funds for rebuilding, once prosperous-looking plantations were dilapidated and desolate. After the advent of tenancy, many quarters were dismantled or abandoned, and tenant shacks were erected on the individual plots allotted to the croppers, soon dotting the main roads through the plantation country.

More positive signs of change were also present--freedmen churches. With black families dispersed to individual tenant farms,

some of unity that existed among workers clustered in a quarters setting was lost. However, freedpeople were now able to forge their own institutions to pull themselves together--fraternal organization and--most important--freedman churches. Oral tradition reminds us that former slaves first formed their congregations meeting in log cabins or brush arbors. By the latter 1860s and 1870s, the congregations had begun to build simple, frame churches--in the case of Baptist congregations, often on the river where baptisms could be held. Most of the early structures have been replaced with more modern buildings on or near the same sites. Among the surviving early congregations are those of St. Paul's, St. Matthew's, St. Andrew's, St. Simon's, St. Augustine's, St. Mary's and Morning Star Baptist Churches. These early churches were overwhelmingly Protestant. One wonders how and where the Catholic freedpeople of French ancestry worshipped. They were in a distinct minority by this time because of the huge in-migration of African-Americans from 1810 to 1860, but many still remained.

Doesn't really explain importance

Part Two:

II. PRUDHOMMES AND ASSOCIATED FAMILIES

1861-1914

A. IMPACT OF CIVIL WAR, RECONSTRUCTION, THE NEW AGRICULTURE

The impact of the Civil War was felt by the Prudhomme family almost immediately, and in an intensely personal way.

INFO ON PRUDHOMMES AND THE WAR

Alphonse Prudhomme I's fiancée, Elisa LeComte, was the daughter of Ambrose LeComte, owner of Magnolia. A, LeComte II and his second wife Desiree had her children in their household since their marriage in 1846. Her son Placide Bossier must have been regarded almost as a son by Ambrose LeComte, his stepfather. Another relative, Paul Bossier, had also lived with the LeComtes in the 1850s. On May 1, 1861, the two young men joined Company G of the Pelican Rangers, commanded by Captain Samuel Hyams, along with another kinsman, Evariste Bossier. Young Placide was killed at the first battle of Oak Hill, Mississippi, on August 10, 1861. Paul Bossier was later killed as well. [ADD

INFORMATION ABOUT ALPHONSE'S WAR SERVICE]

The Natchitoches Rebels, under the command of Captain John D.

Wood, left the parish in September, 1861, joining the 18th Louisiana under Colonel Armant. A member of this group, Emile Toussaint Hertzog, Matthew Hertzog's brother, was killed at their first major skirmish on March 1, 1862. Another Hertzog was killed in the same action. Fred and Henry [Henry was also Matthew's brother] Hertzog both served in the Orleans Guards. Fred was seriously wounded at the Battle of Shiloh. Other relatives who served the Confederacy included Evariste Buard, a member of the Prudhomme Guards, and Alexandre Buard. There was also a group containing many Natchitoches men called the LeCompte Guards, organized in April, 1863, under the command of Captain W.M. Levy, editor of the Natchitoches Chronicle.

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Alphonse Prudhomme's kinsmen, the Hertzogs, were instrumental in forming native guards for the Confederacy among Isle Brevelle's Creole community. Henry Hertzog organized a cavalry squadron of Creoles who called themselves the Augustin Guards. Another group of Cane River infantrymen called Monet's Guards was organized by Hypolite Hertzog and other white planters.

The Prudhomme family supported the Confederacy with financial resources as well as with their young men. Confederate bonds are still in the family's possession.

Few families in Natchitoches were more directly affected by the Civil War than the Prudhommes and LeComtes. Federal troops in retreat from the battles of Mansfield and Pleasant Hill swept through the Cote Joyeuse area in

took

Magnolia Plantation on April 22, 1864 and made camp in the yard. There they were attacked by nine companies of the Twenty-first Texas. A two-day skirmish ensued. In that skirmish, which took place in the field behind the quarters, intense fighting took place, but the Texans were forced to retreat. In the same time frame, battles were fought at Cloutierville and Monette's Ferry, before the retreating Union forces succeeded in crossing the River en route for Alexandria.

Despite the losses they had suffered, Cane River's people, white and black, appear to have overcome any initial bitterness and set about to rebuild their lives. Many of the antebellum workers continued to work on Oakland, either as day laborers or tenants, as will be related later.

ORAL HISTORY REGARDING THE WAR PERIOD

Among the scant family legends concerning the Civil War period is one concerning hiding the family's silver. In a long, marvelous interview of Alphonse Prudhomme II by his granddaughter Cappy Prudhomme, made in 197-- , Alphonse II recalled being told that when the federal armies' invasion was anticipated, "Well, they bundled up all the ^{silver} silder and hid it because they were afraid the Yankees . . . would take it They buried it . . . it down in that well, and I expect they . . . put dirt on it because they wasn't using the well" He also remembered hearing that after the war, it was recovered by the family.

B. FAMILY INFORMATION

The death of Phanor Prudhomme on October 12, 1865 was another challenge to the surviving family and to workers as well. By 1867 the old Bermuda Plantation was divided, with Emanuel Prudhomme taking the portion across the river--renaming it Atahoe Plantation, and Alphonse Prudhomme I taking the portion on the right back descending, renaming it Oakland.

RECOUNT DETAILS ABOUT HIS DEATH HERE

Two major Cane River planter families merged when Elisa LeComte married Jacques Alphonse Prudhomme of the Oakland family. Elisa, baptised November 19, 1840, was the daughter of Magnolia owners Ambrose LeComte and Julia Buard LeComte. She would live until October 20, 1923. Jacques Alphonse was, of course, heir to Bermuda, son of Phanor and Suzanne Lise Metoyer Prudhomme.

give their biographies somewhere

C. RECONSTRUCTION

D. REDEMPTION

E. SPATIAL CHANGES

Few purchases of land were made by the family during the hard times between the Civil War and World War I, but many spatial changes took place with the settlement of Phanor Prudhomme I's estate.

At the death of Ambrose LeComte II, an extensive inventory was made of his property. In 1887, some of the property was auctioned, and 1,960 acres of the Shallow Lake property was purchased by Ambrose's daughter Eliza LeComte, wife of J. Alphonse Prudhomme of Oakland Plantation, for \$12,000.

D. AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION, 1861-1914

During the years 1861-1914, agricultural production varied widely. Without access to markets, the family turned to subsistence farming during the Civil War. After the war's end in 1865, the Prudhommes first employed freedpeople through labor contracts, as required by the government. By the late 1860s they divided the plantation into small farms operated by tenants on shares.

1. 1870

In 1870 the farm property of Alphonse Prudhomme I

2. 1880

In 1880, agricultural production at Oakland

3. 1900

By 1910

WATER TRANSPORTATION IN EARLY 1900S

Some first-hand testimony of life on the plantation in the early 1900s is provided by Alphonse Prudhomme II's interview with his granddaughter Cappy. He was born in 1896. As a boy he recalled seeing the steamboats travelling the river. "We used to live down there at Daisy's [Riverside Plantation, present residence of Daisy Prudhomme] . . . when I was young, and you heard a boat whistle way down there The river is so crooked that you could hear the whistle and see the smokestacks for a long ways We'd hear that whistle blow, and we'd look and see the smoke, and we'd run out to the bank and we'd wait, we'd wait, and we'd wait, and we'd wait! [laughs].

He continued to describe the functions of the boats. "It'd be bringing freight up the river. And it come up here to pick up cotton seed and bales of cotton That was before the bridge was built . . . in 1912, because . . . Red River had damned Cane River up The last high water we had here was in 1908.

Some folk tradition about the river was discussed in the family. Alphonse Prudhomme II recalled that his own father told him a story about why the Cane River is so crooked. Supposedly it was related in a conversation between steamboat captain "Old Muckwell" and Edward Prudhomme (who had heard it from his

father):

Well, old Muckwell [said] . . . to Uncle Eddie one time, 'You know, I don't see why the Lord made such a darn

crooked river as this . . . I've never been up a river in my boat that was so crooked.' And Uncle Eddie said, 'Well, I'll tell you, Captain, . . . it was a dark and stormy night . . . when the Lord was mapping off Cane River and the only light he had was by the lightning, so he got his pencil and put it down on the paper. . . . Every time the lightning would flash, he'd move it a little further . . . He just kept on until he got through, and the next morning when he looked at the map he'd drwon, he said that it's too damn much work to straighten it out.

CROPS

PLANTING LORE OF EARLY 1900S

Recalling planting lore on the plantation during his boyhood years in the early 1900s, Alphonse Prudhomme II remembered that "lots of people went by the moon and the weather. . . it's going to be a dry moon, or a wet moon, or it's going to be cold. They went by lots of signs of the animals When they figure it's going to be cold weather, they said animals put on a heavier coat, like rabbits, and squirrels . . . all the animals."

Another common belief he recalled, especially among the hands, was that it was extremely unlucky to dig in the ground on Good Friday. Alphonse II said in 19 , "I don't believe they're such suspicious now...but, oh boy, . . . you couldn't get one to touch a spade in those days . . . They wouldn't want to plow or

cultivate or use a spade or disturb the ground at all . . . because, they said, the blood would come out of it."

FERRIES

Both before and after the 1912 bridge was built, ferries were in widespread use along the river. Some were quite large. Alphonse Prudhomme II recalled when they used ferries, or "flat boats" to carry livestock, people, buggies, waggon across the river. When he was a boy, he remembered that they "used to have ropes strung across the river And then they'd pull the boat back and forth with that rope, by hand power. . . . When boats came up, the boat would blow for those ferries They'd lower the rope way down in the water where [steam] boats would pass over it.

BUILDING OF THE BRIDGE IN 1912

HUNTING AND WILDLIFE IN EARLY 1900S

Hunting was a favorite pastime for Oakland men, white and black, throughout the generations. Alphonse Prudhomme recalled that in his childhood, he and other boys of the family, his uncles, and some of the workers would go on possum hunts, and he would hunt squirrels and rabbits on his own. One area on the plantation, or near it, was known as the big canebreak lane, and it harbored wolves, fox, and bobcats. Phanor Prudhomme II told his son Alphonse II about hunting there with hounds. The

canebrak lane was a frightening thoroughfare. Alphonse II told a story from his childhood:

It used to be dark through there because it was opened up like it is now. It [was] kind of like a wooded place. And peple always [found it] kind of scary going through. Not only that, they used to have bobcats and catamounts, and stuff like that, that stayed in the hedge. It had a big Cherokee hedge that ran from the river on back towards Red River. . . .

This fellow was coming through there one night, walking, like most of the colored people . . . (well, lots of whites too; no horses or buggies). . . . And he said he could hear something like a hissing sound. He'd stop, listen, [but] wouldn't hear anything. . . . Every time he'd start walking, he'd go a little faster and hear the hissing a little more [laughts]. He said the closer he got to home, he shook sure enough, and . . . he fell through the front door on the floor. His wife said, 'What's the matter?' He said, 'I don't know, but something got behind me and done scared me to death.' . . . The next morning when he got up and dressed and . . . started to walk, the first thing he heard was that same sound. He said, 'Them corduroy pants made me nearly kill myself last night!'

FAMILY EDUCATION

1865-1914

In the early 1900s, the Prudhomme children attended school on the Murray Lambre place. Alphonse Prudhomme II described it as a one-room where all grades were taught. "Dr. Lawton's old office up there [was] used as a school house." School was held for nine months, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Commenting upon why school started rather late compared to today, he answered that "It's take people quite awhile. Lots of them used to walk from school,

walk to school." He mentioned children of the Gongre family who "used to live way back there by the dam, and some of them lived further than that" "If they had horses they'd ride Most, lots of them, walked." The Prudhomme children were among those who rode horseback to school on "Old Sailor" and "Little May." One teacher he recalled was a Mrs. O'Hampton.

Because school was a good distance from home, the children took their lunch, sometimes sausage sandwiches, or butter biscuits with sugar on them.

FOODWAYS, 1865-1914

HEALTH, REMEDIES, DEATH LORE AMONG THE FAMILY

Alphonse Prudhomme II recalled the ways that workers on Oakland dealt with members of their families or community who died. He said they always had a "sitting up," or wake. They would generally hold the wake in the home of the deceased the night of the death and bury him or her the following day. They were generally laid out "on a board with a sheet over it" at the wake, and they "had their spirituals . . . a kind of a prayer-like,

sing-song [chant].

Edward Carrington Prudhomme, Alphonse II's uncle, left his somewhat biased description of the death and funeral of Augustus Johnson, a former worker and relative to many tenants:

March 4, 1910 "Gus Johnson (St Ormy) a wandering Negro died late yesterday evening at JB Edmonds (Bacquie's) cabin--This negro was born and raised here but was always wandering. He is reported owing many people. negroes kep up a continual howl all last night over the body. Funeral at 3 pm this aft. good size crowd in attendance."

[insert short biography of Augustus Johnson]

FAMILY RECREATION, 1865-1914

FAMILY CELEBRATIONS CHRISTMAS

WEDDINGS

The family still has items of clothing associated with weddings from this period. Lucile [Lulu] Prudhomme spoke to her granddaughter Cappy about a wedding veil worn in 1864, or thereabouts, by-----, Lulu's grandmother Keator, at her marriage in Cheneyville, Louisiana. "It had come from France. It was a beautiful thing. . . . My aunt, her daughter Mary, wore it when she married in 1896. And then I wore it in 1924 . . . When Andrea [Vivian Prudhomme Flores' daughter] . . . she wore her mother's wedding dress and her great-great-

grandmother's wedding veil."

CHRISTENINGS

WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES

FAMILY SERVANTS

Alphonse Prudhomme II, in his interview with his granddaughter Cappy, spoke of some of the family servants in the early 1900s, among them Manuel, Charles, and Lee, last names unidentified. He had special memories of the young nurse assigned to him whose nickname was Nig, pictured here with her young charge. PUT PHOTO OF NURSE AND ALPHONSE II AS A BABY HERE. She was little more than a child herself but was very protective of the baby. He tells a story about her attempting to hit a goat that jumped through the fence, accidentally hitting young Phonsie instead, leaving a permanent knot in his nose. She entertained him with riddles and limericks. Two examples are these, as related by Alphonse II. "Blackie went upstairs and laid Whitie on the bed, and Blackie came downstairs and left Whitie on the bed. You would wonder what that was, and she says, 'A black hen went upstairs and laid an egg on the bed.'" ". . . Another one was, 'What has three legs and makes only one track around the house?' A wheelbarrow!"

TENANTS IN THE 1870S AND 1880S

An 1878 ledger, former slaves appear with their descendants,

such as Collins Page and Ben; Derziline Nargot, Dominique [Minique], Andrew, and Rosalie Toussaint, Solomon Williams, Jr., Eugene Williams, Catherine and Louise Williams.

The 1900 Gin Book lists Melanie Francoise. She would be a long-time servant, probably "Mammy" on the place. Her family were slaves. [give short account of Francois family here] , As late as 1929, the Prudhommes rented a cabin to Melanie Francoise for \$2.00 per month.

Other old Bermuda/Oakland families who used the gin were the Helaires, the Lewises [descendants of _____], the Jean Baptistes [descendants of _____], the Plaisances [descendants of Rene Plaisance], the Edmonds, descendants of _____] and the Honores.

In 1902-1904

In 1910, Edward Carrington Prudhomme, at Riverside, wrote in his journal that one of the old workers had died. Feb. 5 "Old Negro Seraphin Edmond died last night--one of the old timers and good darky." [Edward Carrington Prudhomme's 1910 journal] He was the progenitor of the various Edmonds who worked on the plantation through the 1940s and 1950s.

In 1912, many of the former slaves and their children, as well as Creoles who would remain on Oakland well into the 1950s are already working on shares. These include Frank, John, Edward, and Felix Helaire; Augustus Lewis, Collins Page, Julio Jean Baptiste, Ignacias Jean Baptiste [later Batise or Batiste],

Eviriste Dorcino, J. B. Edmonds (Bacquie), Sr.; Neville Jones, and Creoles Emanuel Roques, Delina Roques, Anthony Roques, Amogee Roques, Eugene Metoyer, Alcee Metoyer, Clay LaCour, and Charles Jones.

By 1912 many of these and other Oakland slaves' descendants were working on other plantations nearby. For example, Henry Moses was working for Joseph Cloutier, Caesar Petit for Lestant Prudhomme, Simon Toussaint for Lestant Prudhomme, Darziline Nargot and Seraphine Nargot for P. Felix prudhomme, Bob Dorcino for P. Albert Prudhomme.

TENANTS IN THE 1890S

Ginning record books for the 1890s show that many area planters used the Oakland gin and that many of the former slaves of Bermuda/Oakland either worked for Oakland or on neighboring plantations. Among the sharecroppers in 1893 were J.B. Petit (1/2 hand), Henry Bobb (1/4), Louis Petit, Simon Walker (1/2), Robert Darceno, Minique Jones, Clement Claiborne (1/4), Neville Jones, Daniel williams, Caesar Petit, Bill Nore and his wife Sally Nore, Auguste Lewis, and Ben Plaisance.

RELIGION IN THE FAMILY

E. TENANCY/SHARECROPPING/CROP LEIN SYSTEMS

The slow descent into tenancy and peonage for many southern freedpeople began in disappointment. The widespread myth that the government would provide "40 acres and a mule" died hard but soon, and former slaves soon realized that they would have to make their way with no land, livestock, tools, or money--only their ability to work. Within a year after the war's end, the Freedmen's Bureau began to assist owners and freedmen in a contract system for the production of crops. It was an attempt to protect freedmen, putting them back to work on a negotiated basis.

Under the system, owners were given control over their workers' lives, and freedpeople continued to occupy quarters, although ^{they} they were charged for their own maintenance and for time off. The system was resented by freedpeople--it seemed too much like slavery...and it created enormous tensions every Christmas when contracts were to be signed.

Quote 1867 journal:

Neither owners nor workers liked the systems. Former slaves

aspired to "set up for themselves", instead of working in the constant shadow of whites.

With no chance of land distribution freedpeople (as well as thousands of landless whites) opted for a half-way measure which allowed them to work individual farms on shares to obtain capital for eventual land ownership.

At Oakland the sharecrop system began about 1868 and was in full operation by the early 1870s.

At Oakland and throughout the plantation South, plantations were divided into small units and were "rented" to individual owners.

Share-crop tenants were generally provided by the landowner with land, tools, work animals, and seeds. For this, the owner would receive one-half of the crop as payment. Most of Oakland's tenants worked on this arrangement and called themselves "half-hands" and croppers. If the farmer could provide his own tools, animals, and seeds, he received three-fourths of the crop he raised, giving the landowner one-fourth for use of the land. Tenants call those who worked under such an arrangement "renters" rather than croppers and were "fourth-hands", or worked on fourths. In both arrangements, additional deductions from the prospective crop were taken for charged supplies and food--from the supply merchant who was often the landowner.

In many cases, the crop lien system and credit merchant system bound black families to the land; they would become

bt for the next year's crop, and it proved to be a cruel,
oitive system for workers and unprofitable for owners as

In the plantation South, the vast majority of Southern
ks started the new century, nearly thirty years after
icipation, still a landless, agricultural labor force,
ating tenant farms, with little chance to obtain the land,
eracy, money, and skills necessary for advancement.

SIONS IN THE PLANTATION COUNTRY, 1861-1914

As in any group, tensions and personality clashes
asionally developed on Oakland, between workers, and between
kers and employers.

The 1867 Ledger notes that Gregoire Francois was fined for
ssing Andrew Toussaint and Jules Russel; Rene Plaisance for
ssing and attacking Collins Page, and Virginia Butler and Kere
lth for wuarreling with each other. (page 48)

BEDMEN CONTRACT SYSTEM

In 1866, workers were hired under contracts, with yearly
ntracts commencing on January 4...with monthly wages ranging
om \$4 to \$10, with working days per month ranging from 22 to
. Nursing mothers received half-pay. Among the workers having
ccounts in the 1866 ledger were Albert Goodson, Alexis Petit,
rancoise Petit, Andrew Toussaint, Rosalie Toussaint, Louisa
oussaint, Simon Toussaint, Peggy Toussaint, Collins Page,
ic. a Page, Dorcino Antoine, Louisa Antoine, Derzilin Nagot,
arie Nagot, John Errante, Margaret Errante, Gregoire Francois,

Auguste, Gregoire Francois, Jack Jones, Fanchonette Bob, Melanie Francois, Neville John Louis, Honore Jules, Stephen Smith .

Continuing to work on contract in 1868 were carpenter Solomon Wilson, Solomon Williams, Minique Toussaint, Sosie Stephens, Kitty Butler, and others. The administrator's account for 1868 indicates that on December 28, 1868, "to hands--their pay & share for 1868...\$3,449.98" and for 1867, pay for hands was \$594.33. The ledger does show, however, that after all deductions were made for the sharecroppers, most were slightly in debt to the Prudhomme estate beginning the 1869 season.

Interestingly, at least one worker labored on a share contract in 1866, just after the war. This was Rene Plaisance who received \$163.62 on December 31, 1866, "his wages being a share of one fourth of mares which should go to the horses, and "a portion of his share on the horses."

In family papers, a sample lien form was found, as follows:

"Whereas I _____ has or have received from J A P advances of necessaary supplies to enable me to cultivate during the current year A D 1873 on the plantation known as J. Alp P's Plantation in Cane River

Therefore in order to secure said A P the reimbursement of such necessary supplies as he has already advanced ad furnished me and also to secure him payment for any other necessary supplies and for any advances he may make to me in supplies and in money to purchase necessary supplies and defray necessary expenses of said

plantation during the said year A D 1873 I hereby acknowledge his lien and privilege on all the crop on said plantation, during said year 1873. Shipment to be made by said J. Alp P. from time to time as the cotton is gathered, ginned & pressed--to be sold by A. M & P and proceeds thereof applied by them to payment of any amount and all amounts which I may then be indebted to J. Alp P for advances made & necessary supplies furnished by said J Alp P. the balance of any to be held subject to my order."

Also in the Prudhomme family papers is a contract dated January 20, 1874 with former slave on the plantation, Honore Jules. It reads...

" Jan. 20, 1874
Be it known that on this twentieth day of January of the year eighteen hundred and seventy four we the undersigned Honore Jules of the first Part & Hypolite Jones of thesecond part do enter into the following agreements & stipulations to wit.

First, Honore Jules recognizes that as he is working on the plantation of J. Alphonse Prushomme of the Parish of Natchitoches for the one half of the crops of cotton & corn and potatoes & to be subject to the orders of J Alphonse Prudhomme and to furnish to the said J Alphonse Prudhomme the ----- rails and six cords of wood, fixes fences etc. He hereby employs Hypolite Jones to work with him in said crop and at all planttio & other work which the said Honore Jules has agreed with the said J. Alphonse Prudhomme to perform during the year 1874. He binds himself to pay to the said Hypolite Jones a fair proportion of the corn &

cotton and potatoes made by him during the year 1874 and that J Alphonse Prudhomme shall be the judge that the amount paid said Hypolite Jones shall be a fair compensation for his labor during the said year 1874.

Hypolite Jones of the second part being cognizent of the above and agreeing to it is willing to work with Honore Jules on the said plantation of J Alphonse Prudhomme for the above specified condition and hereby binds himself to work under the said Honore Jules during the year 1874 faithfully and well and to obey all the orders of the said Honore Jules and in case of failure on his part it is agreed that he will be discharged by the said Jules and sent away from the plantation of J Alphonse Prudhomme and neverafter claim the said Honore Jules as his Father.

Be it further agreed that Hypolite Jones is not to leave the plantation without first obtaining consent of Honore Jules & the said H. Jules when desirous to leave the place will inform H Jones of his intention.

Attested by J. Alphonse Prudhomme and signed with their marks by Honore Jules and Hypolite Jones."

Among the 1873-1879, workers and tenants were John Langlois (Helaire), Dominique Toussaint, Honore Jules and Melanie Jules, Noel Anthony, J. B. Charles, Alexis Petit, Auguste Petit Louis, Albert Goodson, York Dorsino, Solomon Wilson (died in 1873) and his wife Marie, Noble Hudson, Flavens John Baptiste, Valsin Charlot, Valmont Llorens, Henry Bob, Elijah Hamilton and Ester Hamilton, Seraphin Edmonds, Julia Braxton, Nancy Lewis, Lewis

ni? , Albert Helaire, Narcisse Chelette, Neville J. Louis,
niel Anthony, Seraphin Edmonds, J.B. Edmonds, Warren Johnson,
k Jones, Rene Plaisance, Stephen Smith, Washington Wilkins,
ia Helaire, Melinda Helaire, Roques Metoyer, Howard Metoyer,
as Metoyer, Rayond J. Batise.

EFFECTS OF TENANCY ON FREEDPEOPLE

1.

2. BIOGRAPHIES OF FIRST GENERATION OF SHARECROPPERS

BIOGRAPHIES OF FIRST GENERATION OF HOUSE SERVANTS CRAFTSMEN

WILSON FAMILY

Among the skilled workers who bridged the transition from
very to freedom on Bermuda/Oakland was head carpenter Solomon
son [not to be confused with the blacksmith, Solomon
liams]. He was born in Virginia in 1815, a source strongly
ored by Louisiana planters for the purchase of skilled
ters. He married an older creole woman, Maria, born in the
ony about 1782.

info

tell his story here

Although Solomon William's son William Smith used his ingenuity to leave, many of the same traits were displayed in his father, who chose to stay. Solomon William's own story shows the inventiveness, creativity, and industriousness displayed by many black workers even within the confines of enslavement, tenancy, and segregation.

tell his story and that of Laide; use illustrations of the iron cross.

In 1867, he struck a deal "to do the plantation blacksmithing throughout the year at \$2 per day." (page 70)

CLEMENT CLAIBORNE FAMILY

DOMINIQUE TOUSSAINT FAMILY

JOHN BAPTISTE HELAIRE FAMILY

One of the cooks in the 1870s was young Albert Helaire, who must have been an excellent cook for he was always getting in trouble but remained with the plantation.]

G. CHANGES IN BUILDINGS AND PLANTATION LANDSCAPE

1. BIG HOUSE

When the estate of Phanor Prudhomme was settled a succession sale was held on December 29, 1868. It is interesting to note the description of the rooms in the Big House from which items were purchased. Emmanuel bought a cypress table and medicine chest from the "Gallery," a writing desk and other items from "Pa's Room," additional items from the "Parlor." Room Number 4 is identified by the initials "J.A.P.," apparently the room of James Alphonse Prudhomme, Room Number 5 as that of "H.P.," probably that of Harriet Prudhomme." Room Number 6 was the

"Dining Room," from which he purchased one-third of the library. Room 7 was identified as the "Pantry," from which he bought crockery, glassware, pewter, silver, and baskets. Room 8 is referred to as the "Office," although he bought from it such items as an old safe, milkcrates, and an ice box. From the area referred to jointly as the "Back Gallery & Room No. 9" he purchased various furniture items. Room Numbers 10 and 11 he referred to as his own, "Manuel's". Room Numbers 12 and 13, "Downstairs," apparently contained agricultural equipment, kettles, bottles, and so forth. A fourteenth room, downstairs, was called the "Nail Room," from which he purchased, among other things, three barrels of nails, files, and lead. His final reference is to the "Pigeon House & Hospital," written together and suggesting that they were located in close proximity, from which he purchased numerous pieces of agricultural equipment including plows and wagons.

Harriet Prudhomme Breazeale's list of purchases refer to the rooms in a similar but not precisely the same way. Room Number 3 is referred to as "Mrs. Lacoul's Room;" a "Garret" [attic?] is referred to, as well as the "Batchelor's Hall," which might be the garconniere that was moved to Atahoe. She too refers to the "Hospital," which was clearly being used for storage in 1868, but does not mention the pigeon house. [source: two handwritten documents relating to the "Succession Sale of P.P. Prudhomme, Dec. 29, 1868, in Prudhomme Family Private Collection, Bermuda, Louisiana.

Bermuda/Oakland Plantation was divided in 1867 between the heirs of Phanor Prudhomme I. Peter Emanuel Prudhomme's portion was that part of the plantation across the river. He named it Ataho [Atahoe], for the stream or bayou which bears that name. J. Alphonse Prudhomme retained the Big House and adjoining land. At first P.E. Prudhomme and his family occupied an old house on the left bank descending, but it burned in 1873. According to family legend, a section of the Oakland Big House called the garconniere--used in french families to accomodate young men of the family--was removed in 1874 to help rebuild the house at Ataho. There is a reference to a bachelor's room in Phanor Prudhomme I's 1865 estate inventory. I do not know if the room was detached or semi-detached. Garconnieres always had separate entrances.

2. GARDENS

OAKLAND'S GARDENS IN LATTER NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES:

No doubt Oakland's gardens went through a period of neglect during the first decade after the Civil War as owners and workers

adapted to their new circumstance. The gardens of Oakland may have been at their peak in the period from 1890 to 1929. It had already been under construction for nearly a century, and gardening staff was still abundant.

Mistresses of Oakland since 1821 had directed its gardens' design and plantings. No one devoted more care to its planning than Marie Laure Coutier Prudhomme and her husband Pierre Phanor Prudhomme II. After her marriage to Phanor II in 1891, Marie Lauree appears to have taken an active interest in developing a rose garden at Oakland, even before her in-laws passed away in 1919 and 1923. A small notebook, which appears to be in his handwriting rather than hers, carefully notes the rosebushes already in place, those planned, and those recently planted in the gardens of Oakland's Big House. A few examples are "Rose, Empress of China, a pink climber in front of parlor doors," "Yellow Marcheneil, second rose bush from steps in bed in front of parlor," "White La France, third in bed on right of steps," and so forth. Roses are identified by beds near cisterns, the gallery, and on "harbors" [arbors] by front of steps [red rambler].

By the early 1920s, the garden, as described by writer Betty Tarpley, was nothing less than spectacular:

A wide gallery, or piazza, extends entirely around the house, including a wing on the right shaded by graceful draperies of age-old Marechal Neil [Marcheneil, referred to in the 1909 journal], clematis and the wonderful, graceful Southern, or yellow, jasmine; it is a great, restful bower at all seasons of the year.

The family at Oakland during Tarpley's visit gave credit to Oakland's first mistress, Catherine Lambre Prudhomme for planning

and planting the original garden.

...Madame Catherine, while her husband tilled the soft ----- of the rich river land, had made for her own dominion the great flower garden that has radiated its brilliant career of beauty, color, and perfume through an century and three years, until now the tall crepe myrtle are trees, the sweet olive, boxwood and judas bud are venerable with age, the syringa has blossomed through many springtimes.

The rose garden on the east side of the Big House had been carefully tended and improved with new varieties by successive generations of mistresses and gardeners.

The rose garden, with its mingling of the old and the new, is redolent with memories. The sweet scents of the pink hundred leaf, the delicate perfume and shining foliage of the old microphillia along the garden fence are holding their own among the modern favoritesL the huge Paul Neyron, snowy Madame Karl Druschkis and Radiance red and pink; the petite, blushing buds of the Baltimore Belle seem doubly lovely beside the queenly American Beauty,

As now, the formal garden in the front of the Big House was graced with seasonal blooms.

The garden is on the east side of the house, running back for several hundred feet, a portion still laid out in formal beds as originally planned. There is a succession of bloom from December to December; as the roses fold their petals for a winter's nap in December, the jonquils, hyacinths and narcissi welcome the New Year with shining faces, and violets purple the garden borders, a very glory of blossoming.

With spring's first breath there is a riot of bloom and fragrance along the hedges of syringa and lilac, while here and there scarlet pyracantha is sending great branches of flaming flowers, and the modest heads of the dainty white Roman hyacinths are bobbing up in straight rows in front of the proud fleur de lys.

In November the wild winter willow gives its white, feathery bloom to take the place of spring's white hawthorne and "Granddaddy Grey Beard," and mingling with the red berries of the yupon and eunonymous there is an alluring combination of autumn color.

An enormous wisteria throws its mighty arms over a high trellis near the piazza. Children of three generations have climbed over its gnarled limbs, and played "house" in its sheltering branches pendant with lavender boughs,

The house and garden were all the more impressive because of the approach through a

long avenue of oaks leading from the "big gate" at the road to the house. These were brought by Emanuel Prudhomme from the southern coast of Mississippi one hundred years ago; and have formed an evergreen and ever loyal life guard at the entrance of this noble homestead through the storms and sunshine of five generations of Prudhommes.

3. COMMISSARY

A plantation store at Oakland was in place by 1880. It became a thriving enterprise. As elsewhere in the South, Oakland's store was a key economic and social institution in the South during the post-bellum period.

It is clear from the inventory that in the 1880s the store functioned as a general merchandise store for the entire community of the Bermuda area, not just as a plantation commissary. Speaking of the plantation's store in his boyhood, Alphonse Prudhomme II said, "You had everything from something to eat, to something to work, to something to wear. Those old country stores were really what you'd call department stores. You could go in there and buy groceries. You could go in there and buy clothes; you could go in there and buy implements, tools, and everything else."

The modes of transporting goods to the plantation store

changed over the years. Alphonse II recalled that "when it first started, it [the supplies] used to come up the river with barges way back yonder before the steamboats' time. And not only that, Papa [Phanor Prudhomme II] said they had an old overseer here and an Indian guide that used to leave here with wagons and go down to what they call Rapides, down where the rapids were in Red River, and meet boats there and get supplies."

The first documented reference to the store that I've located was in an 1874 ledger item: "1874, Feb. 15 "Paid act in Store \$18.15" regarding the account of Seraphin Edmonds. However, the store was probably built in 1868 when the switch to sharecropping commenced. If it had been built in 1867, references would surely have been made regarding its construction in that year's journal. Detailed daily journals fall off after that.

4. TENANT HOUSES

Tenant families had the best recollections of the houses they occupied or visited often. Lawrence Helaire vividly recalls both the house that he occupied as a child and that he shared with his wife as an adult tenant on the Prudhomme place. His home as a child [Felix Helaire's] was "three rooms...straight across....It originally had a dirt floor but later Felix "put in joists and floor silling." "[A]t first it didn't have o [wall] covering. It was just made out of 1"x 12" planks. We'd put two together like that, and you put one on top of that to seal it off. That's the way the walling was put up. Didn't have no inside ceiling."

Felix's house was not a "mud house." His mother "used to put

newspaper" [to fill the cracks and keep out the wind]. It had a fireplace and, later, a wood stove. Much of the cooking was done in the fireplace. Felix's house was located in a small farmstead, with barns, a syrup mill, pens, garden, smokehouse, tool shed, and blacksmith shop. Although the house was built before they occupied it, they made many changes--adding screens to the open shuttered windows, putting in floors, and building a screened porch where Felix would cut and sell beef to both black and white people in the community [beef ears were 5 cents per pound].

NOTE: In keeping with Louisiana laws, crop liens against advances made to tenants for supplies were recorded as conveyances at the Natchitoches Parish Clerk of Court's office. A combination of these records, ledger entries, population and agricultural census records, historical photographs, family records, and oral histories could yield a comprehensive portrait of the lives of tenants and other workers at Oakland, 1865-1945. This should be a research priority for the park.

Although such work in this area is scanty, it appears that many of Oakland's enslaved workers continued to work for the family as freedpeople, initially as contracted gang laborers, then as share crop tenants and day laborers, both in the house and fields. Overseers in the post-bellum period were often Creoles from the area. Although it a long, tedious process, sufficient records are available concerning the slave communities of Prudhomme family and postbellum workers on the plantations to determine the degree of continuity

between the two groups.

In addition to former slaves, Oakland's share farmers and day workers include many who had been slaves on other plantations of the region.

Ledgers and the population census suggests that many of the same families worked for the Prudhommes for decades; often several generations were passed on Bermuda/Oakland. Some former slaves moved out of tenancy and became landowners.

move examples here

5. FENCES

Numerous types of fences are described in the plantation records and in the interviews. They were erected and moved as the need arose. In the ante-bellum period, the fences were generally of log, planks, or split rails. However, bois d'arc and cherokee hedges were also used as fences and boundary markers. A great deal of labor and time was devoted to fencing--construction and repair. In the post-bellum period, until the early 1900s, fencing remained much the same. A few examples of dozens of entries concerning fencing are these excerpts from the 1867 Plantation Journal:

Feb. 11, 1867, "Completed fence from Graveyard to Bayou Noise (?). Commence on Back fence p.m. Men split rails."

Feb. 12, 1867, "Seven men at Pasture fence. Commenced at Corner near Narcisse. Women at fence over River. Four men splitting paling for garden.....Fence near Grandma on fire this morning.

10 pannells [panels] burnt. don't know how."

Feb. 15, 1867, "2 wagons & three men haul logs to patch fence where it is burnt near Grandma's gate. Women get through lane fence at 12 p.m."

6. FREEDPEOPLE'S CEMETERY

A Feb. 8, 1867 Plantation Journal reference states "Women at division fence between Uncle Octave & us beyond grave yard." And in Feb. 11, 1867, a note appears: "Completed fence from Grave yard to Bayou Noise [?]."

MOVE TO APPROPRIATE PLACES THE EXCERPTS BELOW:

Edward Carrington Prudhomme's 1906 journal"

April 4 "Papa Mama Julie Noelle leave for New Orleans this am to attend confed. vet Reunion--Had an egg hunt for Reginald this afternoon. Large crowd at garden and seem to enjoy themselves."

Aug. 5 "Negroes had big church today and baptising--Regular Circus. River rising very slow. Som few fording horse back but rather deep.

Aug. 6 "Felix Prudhomme out to inspect Cobb's crop of cotton--to note damage of Boll weevils. They found many weevils and some large bolls damaged. In fact, don't see any chance of Mr. Cobb making much of a crop."

Aug. 7 Phone no good" "Central on a strike. the phone service."

Aug. 10 "Negroes holding association meeting at Old Degies Church near Vienna Plantation. Regular humbug. too many loafing."

January 15, 1907 "Wedding (Negro) today at Bacquie's (John Edmond Sr.) his daughter Rosa to a negro by name of Wright. Mama Julia Noelle and Laure attended. Big crowd of Negroes there. Negroes loafing Because weather is mild and looks like spring."

June 19, 1907 "Lot of Negroes loafing. Say they are taking 19th Emancipation day and then they are needed in crop."

July 11, 1907, "Papa left for Natchitoches this am by RR to attend meeting called to assist in Prohibition Election to be held on August 17.

July 16, 1907 "Mama left this am for Derry to attend card game at Chopin--Round Table Club."

August 11, 1907 "Leontine (Helaire) Williams daughter of John Helaire died this eve at 6:30 pm--disease consumption. Her trifling husband Alex Williams off somewhere and would not come to see her. It was a regular howling mob at the time of her death and besides cursing and howling several negroes in fights. Regular dogs."

DEATH AMONG BLACKS

November 28, 1907 "Very few here observe Thanksgiving Day. Papa Mama & Noelle left for Natchitoches in surry & buggy 3 am. Constables Nolley & Lattier took up several Darkies to jail for retailing spiritous liquors. Darkies all seem worried."a

SELLING BOOTLEG WHISKEY

The 1910 journal kept by Edward C. Prudhomme provides many insights into the running of the plantation and of the family's social life.

SOCIAL LIFE

Feb. 4 "Papa Mama Julie & Noelle to Natchitoches this am by train."

FAMILY/TRAVEL

LABOR AND LABORERS

Feb. 18 "Ward Taylor of Powhatan, Geo Payton of Little River, Angton Bolton and Jeff Thompson are accused of tresspass. They being the principals who took the law in their own hands. Little River Negroes know everything--as reported."

March 5 "Papa to Natchitoches today--by land to attend meeting of the Natchitoches Fair Association."

FAMILY TRAVEL

[references indicate that the river could be forded by horseback at this time]

March 25

"Negroes and whites loafing today--Good Friday. Plenty of work in field wasting on them. Nord and Dr. Lawton took a crowd of Negroes out to lake to sein. Caught a lot of mudcats and Grimms...

GOOD FRIDAY

March 26 "Negroes on this Oakland plantn worked about 1/3 of the day--starting field wrk at 7:30 this am. They seem to have accumulated the loafing habit of yesterday and previous days."

WORK HABITS, BLACKS

March 27 (Easter Sunday) "I noticed cotton Frank Helaire planted on 18 coming up. among those who have not planted cotton are Paul Edmond Collin Page Ig Baptiste Theodore Sarpy Eugene metoyer-Anstede Gongre- Felisma Rachal-Clement Gongre, Hamilton Ward, Gabe Nargot, Alce Metoyer, Imogene Rocques, Anthony Roques..and a doubt not a few more. With the exception of Eugene Metoyer and Ig Baptiste these other parties hardly make any cotton crop and very little corn."

CREOLE CROPS, BLACK CROPS

March 29 "i understand hands on this place and in the neighborhood are planting corn. They claim what is or was up is being destroyed by the black birds known as (chawks). From information--all farmers are busy planting cotton this day--Most of them (Farmers) are regulated by the moon. Moon right and land not in condition, that's the case--

CORN/PLANTING BY THE MOON

April 20-"Papa Mama Jule & noelie left this am for Alexandria

where they spend two days attending Land Congress. Thence to N.Orleans and from N Orleans to Mobile for Confed Vet Reunion."
TRAVEL/FAMILY

April 23 "Mr. Auguste Rachal here today with Bacquie (JB Edmonds sr) and they say weather entirely too cool for cotton and corn."
BLACKS/WORKERS

April 30 "Lot of Negroes on the place Loafing all day. Overseer says he can't drive them like mules. What a wonder and crops need working."
OVERSEER, BLACK WORKERS

May 1. "Horseback, buggy, surry and wagons have hard time crossing. banks very muddy."
RIVER CROSSING

"I noticed some few peaches on the ground. Plums turning a red color and falling off of trees. "
FRUIT TREES

May 25 "Some few Negroes chopping (hoeing) weeds in corn & cotton--Big Wonder!" BLACK WORKERS

May 26 "Some few hands working in field. Most of them & Overseer claim ground too wet. A mulato woman named Clara Metoyer taken to Natchitoches this a.m. She has been out of her mind for past month." ILLNESS, CREOLE

May 27 "Some few Negroes working in field today. Overseer not watching them."

May 28 "Negroes loafing--and plenty of work on hand. Rainy days are recreation days for field hands on this place--also Saturdays." HOLIDAYS FOR BLACKS

May 29 "Several report finding the Boll Weevil."
BOLL WEEVIL

May 31 "Papa to Derry today. Meeting Phanor Breazeale at Bayou Natchez ad accompaying him to Derry to see Mrs. Lamy Chopin on business." BUSINESS

"Buford found Boll Weevill in cotton back of field (Brevelle) this aft." BOLL WEEVIL

June 1 "Several report finding the Boll Weevil--among the number V & U Lambre Felix Prudhomme, Placide & Lestant Prudhomme and others. They find one or two weevils on a stk."
BOLL WEEVILS

July 6 "Papa received ...a Ford auto." AUTO

July 6 "John Boman caught stealing whiskey from pantry."
STEALING WHISKEY

July 9 "Papa, Julie & Noellie with Jimmy Dezendorf to Natchitoches
in automobile." AUTO

August 7 "Negroes had Baptizing. Usual circus performance."
BLACK BAPTIZING

September 3 "Hill People found auto a wonderful looking
machine". "Mr. Geo Freeman here since yesterday working on gin
outfit." AUTO

Sept 6 "Election at Natchez lively. Some twenty odd unable to
vote..no poll tax and their names not appearing on list."

POLITICS

ALL ABOVE 1910

FROM JOURNAL OF EDWARD CARRINGTON PRUDHOMME, 1913

jUNE 28 " P.E. Prudhomme here this eve and says (upon objection
of J. Alph Prudhomme--of Phil Robinson colored coming across the
Bermuda Bridge Faster than a walk) that many did so, mentioning F
Alex Cloutier and Ursin Lampre he (PER) saw pacing across the
bridge. J. Alp Prudhomme told him he wished he could get a
chance at them--to see them pacing across said Bridge. He would
report to----- (G. Jones?) White people should show example to
ignorant Blacks." PUT WITH TRANSPORTATION/TECHNOLOGY

June 30 "Robt Hunter May & children here this eve. May &
children for a month or more stay. Robt. Hunter returning to
Alexndria. PUT WITH SOCIALIZING, KINSHIP

August 12 "Telephone crews here putting up new Telephone posts."
PUT WITH TECHNOLOGY

August 16 "Negroes, Whites, & Mullatoes loafing. Some out in
Pine Hills. They say they are hunting for tea & Gumbo. Edward
Helaire (negro) with a crowd in Hills. he failed--or wouldn't-
hitch his horse. said horse left and negro Edward Helaire had to
walk home distance and out 12 or 14 miles."

PUT WITH TENANTS AND ETHNICITY

ALSO TENANTS/RECREATION/ MEDICINE/FOLKWAYS

September 22 "Negro Len Johnson on the Fulbert Cloutier place lost cabbin and two children by fire--badly burned himslf."

DEATHS-TENANTS

Sept. 24 "First Communion at St. Charles Chapel today. Priest from Alexandria assisted Father Schlosen Seven first communicants (one boy six girls) Good crowd in attendance. Priests were entertained at church--basket picnic style. all report a very pleasant time."

FAMILY RELIGION

S

sept. 25 "Papa Mama Julie & Noelie to Natchitoches in auto--Papa to attend call meeting U.C.V.

AUTOMOBILE/TRAVEL/FAMILY

"Ginning today--yard crowded with Wagons."

GINNING

Dec. 13 "Indications point to finish ginning by next Saturday. c/seed @ 12.00 here pr ton, remarkably low price. Edgar Llorence, Emanuel Rocque, Eugene Metoyer (mulattoes) and Charley Jones late in picking cotton. They are not worth much."

TENANTS/CREOLES

Dec. 15 "Papa Mama Julie Noelie and Verna Breazeale returned from Natchitochs this am. auto. Roads reported very bad. several mud holes."

AUTO/BAD STATE OF ROADS

Dec. 17 "River rising. Now over sand bar in front of store and about 1/2 way up on First stut of bridge. Mass this am at Chapel. Xmas tree school this afternoon."

HOLIDAYS, RELIGION, STATE OF RIVER

Dec. 18 "Mama & sisters to Natchitoches by buggy. Bacquie driving." "Negroes loafing. Geo Helaire-Frank Helaire-Aug Lewis-John Helaire short crop and want money. Don't now what to do for them."

AUTO/ CROPPERS WANT MONEY

Dec. 23 "Negroes & Whites loafing taking Xmas. same ought to have been abolished yers ago--a farce."

HOLIDAYS

Dec. 24 "Henry Bobb (Negro) Pastor of St. Paul Church died this afternoon." DEATH/ ST. PAUL'S RELIGION, HENRY BOBB

Dec. 25 "Dull Xmas."

CHRISTMAS

Jan 7 1914 "Papa off this am for Lake Charles in interest of ---
---Texas & Natchitoches RR"

RAILROAD

Jan. 9 "Louis Metoyer (mulatto) who moved here recently died this am of Lagrippe. He has son & daughter here and son working at Dr Keators."

CREOLE/DEATH

March 28 1914 "Found this am body of Negro in Cane River at Mathew Johnes Chaler place--party unknown."

DEATH OF BLACK MAN

April 24, 1914 "Papa Mama Julie & Noelie to Natchitoches this am in auto. "Covering kitchen Old House (Leveques) where I now reside-needed badly."

AUTO, FAMILY, LEVEQUE HOUSE

April 28 "Negroes loafing by the 100000 and Hell raised by overseer"

OVERSEER

May 14 1914 "Mass today at St. Charles Chapel quite a number some 30 odd made their Easter duties."

FAMILY RELIGION

May 18, 1914 "Papa & Noelie to Natchitoches this am Ford auto Jack Edmond driving."

AUTO/FAMILY TRAVEL

The Helaires remained, or returned, to the plantation after the war.

SECTION FOUR: ADJUSTMENTS TO ECONOMIC CRISIS, WORLD WAR, AND
CHANGING TECHNOLOGIES

1914-1945

Part One: The Setting

I. GENERAL OVERVIEW

During World War I, the out-migration of Louisiana rural black

workers picked up momentum. It had begun with the North Louisiana Exoduster movement of the late 1870s and had reemerged after the Boll Weevil invasion in the early twentieth century. After 1910, it picked up speed again, encouraged by U.S. involvement in the war, labor shortages and attractive pay in northern urban and industrial centers, and improvements in transportation to those distant job markets. Louisiana planters worried about their uncertain labor supply, as many younger tenants left plantations and tenant farms for factory jobs in Detroit and Chicago, or maybe just to nearby lumber mills where they could get weekly pay checks.

Both agricultural production and cotton prices were high from 1914-1919. Foreign markets were disrupted and unreliable, but domestic demand for cotton and grain was unparalleled. Even the war years had a down side for cotton farmers. Production costs rose as well. Although the war's demands brought high prices, they also stimulated competition. For the first time, foreign cotton growers exceeded 10,000,000 bales, and the cotton was of good quality. War-related research produced synthetics, which, as one agricultural historian has observed, provided a "deadly and permanent form of competition." Nevertheless, 1919 was a banner year--good harvests and good prices. At one point, cotton prices soared to 43 cents per pound, before leveling off to an average of 35 cents, still incredibly high. Cotton planters and farmers were confident that the good times would continue. Many were more prosperous than ever before.

In 1920, however, the short-lived boom collapsed. A

combination of factors, including overproduction, foreign competition, development of synthetic fibers, boll weevil infestation, and retaliation to U.S. tariff policies, resulted in a sharp decline both in demand and prices by 1920. Cotton lands were overplanted, and both landholders and tenants had overextended their credit. The Cotton South faced ruin. The "Fat Years" for much of the nation, 1920-1929, were lean and dismal for farmers. While the stock market soared and business investments and earnings climbed, two industries were left out of the general prosperity--the textile industry and agriculture. Some experts believe that the Depression hit agriculture eight to nine years before it affected the rest of the nation.

Although agriculture suffered throughout the 1920s, the nation as a whole prospered until the Stock Market Crash of 1929 ushered in a depression that had been on the way for a decade. Even during the affluent twenties, however, the economy was seriously imbalanced--income was badly distributed, the corporate structure, including the banking structure, was weak; and speculation was out of control.

Although the economy of the 1920s was unhealthy, for many Southerners, including those in Natchitoches Parish, it was an exciting age. Rural folk, or at least those who could afford it, had their lives broadened by such innovations as the radio and the automobile. By 1929 over ten million families had radio receivers--among them, many rural dwellers. By the 1930s it was commonplace for planter and farm families to gather around the railroad to listen to the news, a favorite comedy or musical radio

program, sports event, or crop reports. By the late 1930s, rural dwellers' tastes were being shaped further by a mass culture through the medium of motion pictures. Many Cane River residents, of all races, recall seeing movies in Derry and in bars along the River in the 1930s and 1940s. The most revolutionary product of the twenties, however, was the automobile, which, though invented earlier, came into wide use after World War I. By the mid 1920s, automobiles were affordable, and many planter families purchased their first Model T Fords.

The Great Depression, which held the entire nation in its grip for nearly a decade, impoverished the rural, agricultural sections of the South further. In the 1930s, cotton first dropped to 9 cents per pound, causing some alarm. Then prices began to plummet more drastically. Interest and costs of supplies also dropped, but not nearly so precipitously. Adding to the woes of the Cotton South, many workers who had left for jobs in industry lost their positions and returned home, increasing the unemployed farm population. Depression times were as hard for owners as for tenants. Many lost their farms and plantations due to foreclosures; they couldn't reduce the costs of sharecroppers and hired labor quickly enough to keep up with their own declining incomes. Although farmers were advised to cut production, in desperation, they produced more. Huge crops in 1930 and 1931 contributed to a further drop in cotton prices to 5 cents per pound, way below cost of production.

Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal required farmers to cut back on production. As a drastic measure to force prices up, cotton

farmers in 1933 were required to plow under one-fourth of their crops or be penalized. When tenant farmers and their mules plowed under their cotton crop, they were, in fact "plowing under an old way of life."

During the 1930s, many tenants began moving out of farming. With poor cotton prices and cut backs in production, tenants searched for jobs elsewhere, often in towns and cities. They joined a huge army, white as well as black, unemployed and searching for jobs. As was true since the 1870s, some left seeking less racial discrimination. And a small percentage, even in the late 1930s, left because they had been displaced by machines, "tractored out," as some put it.

Mechanization of agriculture in the South during the late 1930s and early 1940s was not widespread, but some larger farmers had purchased tractors to lower their production costs. At first they attached old mule-drawn equipment to the tractors, then, as they could afford it, bought plows and disks designed for tractors. Still only 8 percent of farmers had tractors in 1939. Although signs of the changes which would be wrought by mechanization were rumbling beneath the surface, in Louisiana in the late 1930s and even early 1940s, plantation agriculture was much as it had been since the 1880s. Most farmers--a large percentage of them landless tenants--operated one or two-mule farms of less than thirty acres.

New Deal policies helped bolster prices, but it would take the stimulation of World War II to bring cotton prices back to a reasonably healthy level.

Part Two:

PRUDHOMME AND ASSOCIATED FAMILIES

1918-1945

II.

A. FAMILY INFORMATION

1. DEATH OF ALPHONSE I

2. PORTRAITS OF MAIN FAMILY MEMBERS, ESPECIALLY
PHANOR II AND HIS WIFE

3. IMPACT OF WORLD WAR I ON FAMILY AND TENANTS

FAMILY SERVICE

IMPACT ON TENANTS

The outmigration of Louisiana rural black workers which had begun with the North Louisiana exoduster movement of the late 1870s picked up again with the boll weevil invasion in the early 1900s. After 1917, it accelerated again, encouraged by U.S. involvement in the war, labor shortages, and attractive pay in northern industrial and urban centers. Others took up part-time or full-time jobs in the timber operations that began to flourish in Louisiana. Owners worried about their labor supply, especially as prices had recovered.

B. AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS AT OAKLAND

1. Agricultural production and cotton prices were high from 1914 through 1919, and production rose, although so did production costs. In 1919 cotton prices soared to 44 cents per pound. The short boom collapsed in 1920--and after that, both demand and prices sharply declined.

In a brief and general inventory associated with the succession of J. Alphonse Prudhomme witnessed on 13 May 1919, one gains some

sense of what the plantation was like at the end of W.W. I. It included the current crop of 140 bales of cotton "in the hands of Putnam and Normand of New Orleans," various plows, cultivators, hand tools, and so forth, which show no sign of mechanized equipment, a stocki of goods in the store, four old wagons, one old surrey, one old buggy, and a two-year-old Chandler Automobile. Livestock included 35 head of mules and colts, 52 head of common cattle, 6 head "graded cows," 1 common bull, 1 "Graded bull," 6 old steers, 8 calves, 20 hogs, and 32 head of common sheep. Interestingly, no horses were mentioned.

2. 1920-1929

3. 1930-1939

4. 1939-1945

C. IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY (AUTOS, ETC.)

D. IMPACT OF THE DEPRESSION ON OAKLAND

The 1920s, fat years for the rest of the nation, were terrible for cotton farmers and got even worse in the early and mid 1930s. The long depression was hard on Oakland's owners and tenants. Although farmers were encouraged to cut production--desperately they produced more and more. Huge crops in 1930 and 1931 caused a further drop in cotton prices--to 5 cents per pound, far below cost of production.

1. AGRICULTURE DURING THE DEPRESSION AT OAKLAND

MAKING DO AT OAKLAND

Oakland's Pruhommes had a strong propensity to "make do," even when times were prosperous. The family raised their own food during the Depression, home-raised beef, pork, and poultry, produce from a large garden, and milk from a small herd of dairy cows.

Even before the worst years of the Depression, the Prudhommes began to raise sheep and goats, both for their fleeces and for their meat. Mutton was sold, as was goat and sheep wool.

Family members recall some of the economizing that was done during those years:

The hard times of the Depression also meant that, even more than usual, structures were constantly being moved, adapted, and demolished for materials to repair or to build other structures. Almost nothing was wasted, but the plantation setting was always

in flux, in the process of revision. This was particularly true of Oakland which had a precipitous decline in fortunes in the 1920s and 1930s, and survived only because of the ingenuity and determination of its owners and workers.

An example of this recycling and innovation is the fishing camp. Kenneth Prudhomme recalled that the fishing camp was established in the twenties or early thirties during the Depression [the Depression affected agriculture nearly a decade before it became general]. It was established to generate income for the family during the hard times.

Vivian Prudhomme Flores recalled only a single outhouse which served both fishing camphouses, Mayo Prudhomme and Lawrence Helaire recalled two outhouses. Lawrence Helaire, who is considerably older than the Prudhomme brothers, recalled four small camphouses in the fishing camp and pointed out their location to the north of the house where the one remaining structure still stands.

He commented, "They used to have a bunch of camp houses along there from that fence going the other way. Let's see they had one, two, three, four camphouses. Used to be along there."

He may have recalled the old blacksmith shop, and perhaps another small building that was in the same vicinity but was not used as a camphouse.

Vivian Prudhomme recalled that the camphouses had screened-in porches and were white-washed [a photograph exists]. They were furnished with iron bedsteads, wardrobes, chairs, and hand-made,

tin-lined iceboxes, one of which still remains in the extant cabin. Cooking took place outside, and there were a table outside for cleaning fish and eating.

With frugality and sound management, the Prudhommes weathered the Depression years. All was not bleak. Family members recall lots of social activities, including baseball games, horseraces, trips to friends and relatives homes for house parties, fishing, picnics and hunting expeditions at the camp in the Kisatchie hills, and, of course, lots of church activities.

2. IMPACT OF THE DEPRESSION ON TENANTS

Many tenants were forced out of farming in 1930s, and many owners lost their land. In the Bermuda area, many tenant families left because they just couldn't make it. Lawrence Helaire observed that during the depression, "A lot of them left their crops and just moved." One tenant went to California with "only a changing and shoes," but he found out that times were rough there and came back. On Oakland, tenants took on a great number of additional tasks for which they were paid day wages. However this was common both before and after the Depression. Emile Llorance, who also farmed, worked at the gin and was responsible for sharpening 160 gin saws in one day in 1928. John Helaire worked "off and on" in the flower garden in March and October of 1929. Bob Medlow did occasional blacksmithing that year. Charley Helaire hauled wood for the gin and installed a press there. Felix Helaire worked at the press, the gin, on the bridge, drove wagons, repaired the pigeon house, all in addition

to his usual farming, butchering, and ferry operations.

In 1929 Rosine Christophe was washerwoman, receiving \$6.00 per month; Suzette Metoyer served as the main cook, at \$6.00 per month, and her husband Rene [Rainey] was the "yard and stock man" at \$25.00 per month [in 1941 his son would only receive \$22 for the same work suggesting that the worst effects of the Depression were after 1929 and lingered in the early 1940s].

More information on this subject will be found in the tenancy section.

E. IMPACT OF WORLD WAR II ON OAKLAND

F. SPATIAL CHANGES IN THE PLANTATION

With the death of Alphonse Prudhomme I on February 17, 1919, additional changes took place. Oakland was further divided among heirs--and Phanor Prudhomme II took up residency in the Big House. [in content note mention that the heirs were Mrs. Elisa Prudhomme, the widow, and their children Phanor P. Prudhomme, Edward Carrington Prudhomme, Cora Lawton, wife of E. G. Lawton, Lalla Hill, wife of S. H. Hill, May Hunter, wife of Robert A. Hunter, Noelie Cockfield, wife of L. A. Cockfield, and Julia Prudhomme. "Petition to the 11th District Court, Natchitoches Parish, of Elisha Prudhomme, petitioning for probation of her husband's will. 9 April, 1919," in Prudhomme Family Private Papers, Bermuda, Louisiana.] His will instructed the division of

the property, including Oakland, with Phanor receiving the "old homestead," the gin, the "dwelling occupied by my son Edward [now referred to as the Doctor's House], and adjoining lands.

Although only minor changes took place in terms of land acquisitions or sales in the period from 1914 to the end of World War II, some significant changes did take place in land use, particularly in the New Deal Era, and some changes took place in the physical landscape of the plantation. Other outbuildings and fences were built, moved, and dismantled as the need arose.

AGRICULTURAL EQUIPMENT CHANGES

A 1929 plantation ledger lists expenses incurred in the purchases of new equipment such as a Dixie Corn and Cotton Planter, for which \$23.99 was spent, and an Avery Queen Cultivator, \$51.00. Interestingly, Felix Helaire also bought an Avery Queen Cultivator that year, for \$62.00, probably through the Oakland store.

CROP VARIATIONS

One of Phanor Prudhomme II's pocketbook accounts of crops, for 1941-1942, has survived. He carefully notes the planting of corn and peas in March, sweet potatoes in May, and lists the crops of each sharecropper in 1942, giving a good account of the plantation's configuration at that juncture.

Emage Helaire, a 1/2 hand, planted one bushel of corn and one of soybeans on the road cut March 30, and on the east cut as well. On May 29 he planted one bushel of each below the engine room, and 10 rows [of cotton?] the next day. His employer noted that Emage was through planting on Saturday morning, May 30.

Phanor kept the same meticulous record of the cotton, corn, soybeans, and sugar cane planted by all tenants and workers, as well as noting when they commenced replanting and "chopping out" the crops.

In 1943 he made note of vegetables planted in a "truck patch" and "in garden." In the truck patch, he raised Irish potatoes, early sweet corn, cucumbers, squash, and okra. In the garden, in late February, he planted beets, spinach, mustard [greens], lettuce, carrots, followed in March by waxbeans, roquet (?), dill, sweet peas, large wakefield cabbage. In April, he set out 98 tomato plants, more radishes, lettuce, greens, wax beans, butterbeans, and a row of musk melons.

Phanor Prudhomme II keeps the crop record through 1947 [he died in 1948], and then it is picked up in similar detail by his son James Alphonse (Phonsie) in 1948 and continues until 1961, in an era of wage crops and mechanized production.

G. CHANGES TO STRUCTURES AND NEW CONSTRUCTIONS

1. BIG HOUSE

Numerous additional changes were made over the years to accomodate the needs of the family--primarily in the kitchen areas, additions of bathrooms and closets, and the enclosing of a central hall. The roof, originally wood shingles, was covered with slate from the old LeComte town house. Later it was re-roofed with the present materials.

Concerning some of the changes made to the Big House, Mayo Prudhomme remarked:

"That...little coffee nook...in the breakfast room of the kitchen area--that was all open porch at one time. There were steps to the north going out. Just to the west there was a tower that contained a water tank, and there were a number of huge liquid batteries that they used for electricity...I don't know when it was put up, and I'm not really sure when it was torn down--may have been in the late forties or early fifties."

Vivian Prudhomme Flores described some of the changes in the back of the structure, as she took me on a verbal tour:

"The ell, or elange, that's on here was added to put the kitchen in the house. Out on the back was the kitchen; the room closer in was the pantry. When I was growing up, they prepared the food and brought it into the main dining room. You can see where that small window is? That was the space between the two buildings; they weren't... attached until about 1953....Papa attached them and put the kitchen in the house even closer, and took part of the porch in."

Vivian Flores Prudhomme also described changes in the bottom floor of the house:

"As we approach the house up the front steps, under the house we have six dirt-floor rooms. Two of them, at this time, are used as a museum and house quite a few artifacts that were here on the place. We also have the tack area...the saddles and the bridle racks....They used to bring the horse through and would saddle them here [to] have them ready for the ladies and gentlemen of

the family."

Ann Malone: "Do you know if any of the house servants lived in the house, or under the house?"

Vivian Flores Prudhomme: "None under the house except for the Mammy, and she lived under the master bedroom. There's still a stairway."

We moved around the house to view the bottom floor rooms on the east side of the structure.

Vivian Flores Prudhomme: "We're under the south gallery, on the east side, and the room I'm pointing to has a screen--a slatted door. That was where they would dump all of the potatoes when I was growing up. Now we are going under the south side of the back gallery...into the Mammy's room. [T]here's a fireplace down here, over in the east corner of this room [this room is directly below the master bedroom]. The stairway in the east corner over there comes up into the corner ...of the fireplace in the master bedroom. And there is a window right here that is not open...."

"The wine cellar is directly in the center of the house under the dining room." It was entered from a trap door in the hall.

Upstairs, we went into the back bedroom on the house's south side--the master bedroom.

Vivian Prudhomme Flores: "The wall came all the way into the front bedroom, and...my grandfather or my great-grandfather built

a closet here, and that's where the Mammy's stairs are. Growing up as a girl, that was my bedroom, and the trapdoor opened... in my closet, down to the Mammy's room."

In addition to documenting changes in the interior, the interviews contain much valuable information concerning landscaping around the Big House, and how plantings and fences changed over the years.

GARDENS

2. DOCTOR'S HOUSE

During this period, the structure was often used as a Prudhomme family home. According to Kathleen Prudhomme Batten and Daisy Prudhomme, their grandfather, Edward Carrington Prudhomme and grandmother, Emma Laure Prudhomme, lived in this house at the time that their father, Reginald Prudhomme, was born. After he inherited the plantation, Alphonse Prudhomme I lived in the Big House, and his eldest son Phanor II lived in Riverside Plantation House (which Daisy Prudhomme still occupies). Another son, Edward, lived in the Leveque house. After Alphonse I's death, Phanor--the eldest son--moved into the Big House, and Edward and his family moved to Riverside. Later, Jesse and Marie Adele Prudhomme Brett and their family lived there. During the many changing occupancies of the Leveque house, numerous alterations and additions were made. Miss Daisy Prudhomme has photos of the house during her father's childhood; it is almost unrecognizable as the same structure.

3. SEEDHOUSE, NEW GIN, ENGINE ROOM, CA. 1920-1960

Mayo Prudhomme describes the seedhouse, new gin, and engine room:

"Behind the overseer's house, out in the middle of what is just a tillable field, the only remaining structure . . . is the old seed house. Prior to 1941, my dad and grandfather had a gin there, and they had a diesel-powered...single-cylinder Fairbanks-Morris engine in it . . . You had the seed house, the gin building, and the boiler room. The boiler was for an old steam engine that used to power the engine before they went diesel."

Kenneth Prudhomme, in pointing out the remains of the gin, engine room, and seedhouse complex, stated that it was "closed in '41 or '42," that was when the last crop was ginned on the place. He pointed out "the remains of the old cistern that was water storage for the steam engine that was up there until the early twenties when it went out on them and they replaced it with an oil burner, a diesel engine."

4. STORE

Oakland's store was the center of plantation life during the period from 1914-1945. Food, clothing, medicine, and plantation supplies were bought or charged there. The store's porch and yard were meeting places to exchange news or gossip, for children to play, and for workers to relax. It was a community center for the Bermuda area's white residents as well as tenant families, particularly after it also served as

a post office, first beginning in the 1880s until 1919, then starting up again in 1924 and lasting until about 1967.

Well into the 1940s and 1950s, the store served as a focal point on the plantation--not only as the source of farm supplies and groceries, but also a gathering place for tenant families and day workers to visit as well as shop.

Referring to the back portion of the store, Kenneth Prudhomme stated that "...I don't know when or if it was added to the building, or if it was just remodeled and made into living quarters for Lestant Prudhomme, who was Uncle Buddy (I think it was Lestant)"

Kenneth Prudhomme talked about the store on several occasions. He also recalled that his Uncle Buddy, one of his father's brothers, had an apartment in the northwest corner of the store building.

When asked if the store had a wood-shingled roof in his memory, Kenneth Prudhomme replied that it always had a tin roof.

Mayo Prudhomme: "I remember it being stated (I don't know how factual it is) that the old store was supposedly the carpenter shop when the home was built. Looking at the inside of it, I find it difficult to believe, because it does not have the characteristics of so many of the older buildings--the bousillage...the hand-hewn timbers. At any rate, it was located on the river road itself, out in front of the home. It, to my knowledge, has always been in that location. It was the commissary for the plantation. Of course, in later years when

they went to sharecropping, ...the farm hands would come in and get their commodities, usually on Saturday, and they would charge their commodities against the crop. At the end of the season, my dad would figure up what they owed, and there was an interest rate charged on it. For some reason, it seems it was twenty percent. You have to bear in mind that there was nothing to keep the sharecropper from just getting up and leaving before the crop was even in. In 1941, as a matter of fact, the store lost just about everything it sold because the crop was absolutely doomed."

"As a kid, we used to work in the store and help our dad, as did my son in later years when he was just a young lad. He talks about helping Paw-Paw at the store. We had dry rice (bulk rice), sugar, coffee...flour and corn meal and so forth. Just all kinds of medications and stuff....We had the scales in there. Of course, in our time we had electricity, [and] we had electric scales. But prior to that they had the old balance arm scales cane fishing poles, cotton picking bags, clothes--the big old pink flannel bloomers that women used to wear, shirts without collars for the celluloid collars. We had the collars in there also and the cuffs, high button-up shoes for women, reading glasses, dyes, bric-a-brac...you-name-it."

" ...[N]ot only that, my dad was the postmaster at Bermuda, which was a town or a settlement at that time. He was the postmaster there for over fifty years; he retired from the postoffice in that capacity. It was all incorporated right in

the store, and it was actually the only commissary [in the area] that had a calling card--that being the post office, because people would have to go there every day to get their mail (the ones that did not have delivery on the routes."

[Although too lengthy to include in this response, Mayo Prudhomme tells some interesting anecdotes about the social aspects of the store].

Mayo Prudhomme described the store as it was in the late 1940s. "As you walked into the store it was, of course, one big room. And on either side, they had small ante-rooms, each of which had a double-opening door where you could bring [in] supplies.... On the far south part of the porch was an ice box where my daddy used to sell [ice]. He would get 300-pound blocks of ice from the ice truck....He kept it all the time for fishermen and so forth. You could go by and buy 10 cents worth of iceWe had the ice tongs and saws and ice picks....and an ice slide where you could slide the blocks down to the trucks...."

Malone asked, "Were those two ante-rooms for storage?"

Mayo Prudhomme: "Right. The one on the south side was mostly for dry storage. That's where they put the pecans when they bought them. They had a big bin in there that they just dumped the pecans in when they'd been picked on the place or if [Dad] had bought them from someone else--until they were picked up by L.S. Johnson Pecan Company in Natchitoches. The room on the north side was almost all petroleum products. We had a drum of Larsol in there, which was a cleaning fluid, very lethal. They

also had a kerosene pump and oil pump for bulk motor oil. Also there were two bulk oil pumps on the front of the store also."

"In the back of the south side was a little office which Al and Ken, in later years, used for their office. But prior to that, it was more or less a junk room. In the center part was my dad's office, in the middle of the back. He had a window where he could...see if anyone came into the store. The counters up front formed a U, so people came into the middle part of the counters, and we were behind the counters."

Malone: What kind of heating did you have?

Mayo Prudhomme: "None in the front....In the back we had a fireplace. My dad, from time to time, would use the old fireplace, sometimes the wood stove. In later years, he put in kerosene heaters which ran back there."

Malone: "Did they ever use tokens, or did they use regular cash [for cash purchases]? The tenants, I'm speaking of."

Mayo Prudhomme: "The tenants were all on credit....Now there was a token millage that was active, and we had to collect tokens (which were one-tenth of a penny or whatever, for taxes. ---They were little silver tokens with diamonds cut out of the center, real collector's items now."

Malone: "Where was the post office part of it?"

Mayo Prudhomme: "The post office part of it was toward the back of the store. As you walk in, it was all the way to the back, on the left side, behind the southern-most supply room or store room. It was just a very small alcove area, probably 10 feet by

15 feet."

Malone: "Did it have pigeonholes [for individual mail patrons]?"

Mayo Prudhomme: "Well, it did, yes. but it was just a big box that was about...4 feet by 3 feet. It had pigeon holes, but it was only accessible from our side. The mail was stored in their [slot] alphabetically, and if people came in, we would pull [their mail].

"[A]fter electrification came through, [Dad] put a water pump in the store, an electrical water pump that supplied lake water to the house for bathing and diswashing....We got the drinking water from the cistern...that was caught off the roof after the spring rains...."

Malone: "Did you sell bait out of the store?"

Mayo Prudhomme: "My dad did. He used to raise shiners, and he dug a couple of ponds out in the side yard north of the house. You can still see the indentions where they were. He raised shiners to sell to the fishermen."

Some tenants and employees recognized the high prices of plantation commissaries and the dangers of over-charging and used these stores sparingly. Generally they were those tenants or renters who were better off financially and less cash-poor.

Camille Metoyer worked as cook for the Prudhomme at the Big House and was wife of the overseer [Leo Metoyer]. She was the daughter-in-law of Rainie [Rene] and Suzette Metoyer who were overseer and cook before Leo and Camille. She and her family (including

her in-laws) occupied the structure called the "Overseer's House."

When asked about their use of the store, she said,

"We used to buy our groceries down Cane River. Then we started coming up to Natchitoches to buy them [They had a car].

When asked, "When you were on Oakland, did you buy a lot there at the store?", she answered,

"We bought some there. If we'd run out of something, we'd buy it there."

Atlas and Lucinda Helaire, who were very frugal half-hand sharecroppers, also used the store sparingly and charged as little as possible.

Lawrence Helaire also speaks of the store: " There was a grocery store there right in front of the Big House. There was a weigh station there and all....and at the end, they'd settle up."

Lawrence Helaire mentioned that as a child he and others would "gather the pecans and then come [to the store] and sell them on haves, they'd call it...."

In her interview with her grandfather, Cappy Prudhomme retrieved important information about the store and postoffice. In response to her questions, Alphonse Prudhomme II proudly recalled serving as postmaster for thirty-eight years before giving it up in 1961 or 1962. Several other family member worked as postmaster at the store until it closed, he believed, in 1967. But he wasn't the first postmaster for the Bermuda area. He

recalled that Eland [or Iland] Metoyer was the first, across the river, perhaps as early as 1877. When he gave it up Alphonse Prudhomme I brought it to Oakland. After his death in 1919 Ursin Lambre removed the postoffice to Lambre's Store [on the left bank] where he and his brother Bosan operated it until 1923 or 1924 when Alphonse II brought it back to Oakland.

5. BREVELLE STATION

According to Alphonse Prudhomme II and Lucile Keator Prudhomme, Brevelle Station was built by Alphonse I [1838-1919], probably in the early 1900s. Alphonse II recalled, "About halfway between Natchez and Cypress there used to be a depot called Brevelle....Grandpa Alphonse had built a place there, so ...they put a side track there [to] pick up cotton, or anything that had to be shipped."

6. BERMUDA BRIDGE

7. SMOKE HOUSE/NEW MULE BARN

I asked about the small squares, which Kenneth Prudhomme said were "to hold rails along the side of the building. We stored hay in that area when they increased . . . the horsepower on the farm. They had three extra mules they had to have stalls for, so they took part of the hay storage and put three stalls in it." Kenneth Prudhomme also observed that the wood-shingled roof is not original. It was re-roofed by his grandfather, Phanor Prudhomme II.

Mayo Prudhomme said, "[I]t was modified to become a mule barn

after what was known as the big barn burned. I think that was about 1925. My mother and dad were already married, and it was filled with hay and was struck by lightning. Of course it burned to the ground before they could do anything. It was [constructed of] dry timber and was full of hay. But they got all the mules and some of the equipment out....From what I understand, it was huge. It took up quite a bit of room back behind--just north--of what is known as the square crib, and south of what is now known as the mule barn. It's about where the cottonpicker shed is located--the high-roofed shed--but it covered quite a spread of ground apparently."

Kenneth Prudhomme and Vivian Flores Prudhomme recalled that the old mule barn burned in 1927 rather than 1925.

Lucile Prudhomme remembered that the plantation bell was rung when "lightening struck the old barn. . . . We rang it to attract attention ...so people would come to help because of the fire. But the old barn burned....It was full of hay, and...there was no way of stopping it, but people came when they heard the bell."

8. WAREHOUSE

While we were standing at the west end of the Bermuda Bridge. Kenneth remarked, "I was saying that the old warehouse for the plantations (for steamboats, where Daddy said they used to load seed out and baled cotton; they'd get supplies for the plantation off the boats when they came up the river) was right about [there]. Well, the approach to the new bridge took in that piece of property. It was right on the edge of the bank. Right adjacent to that old building where the old River Road used to go

down was a gate that all of the older hands on the place called the quarter gate. It was the gate to the slave quarters."

"The warehouse was right where the approach to the new bridge is. There was a big old building right on the bank of the river there."

Former tenant Lawrence Helaire also has vivid recollections of the cotton warehouse and landing, which he said was also used as a cotton seed house and later as a camphouse for fishermen. He said that it was right up on the bank, and had a large cottonwood tree on the southside of the building. He recalled still seeing cotton and supplies being loaded and unloaded when he was a boy, and, on one occasion, he witnessed a fight.

"...[T]hey had a row started, and the foreman, head boss man-- whatever--he wanted to whip one of the workers.... That started a fight. I can remember some of them left to go home to get a gun....They got them stopped, but they had a big ruckus there for a while." He remember that his father Felix and uncles Ben and Frank Helaire and Uncle Fob [F.J. Batise] were involved.

"I don't know what went on between them, but you know, they [the boat foremen] used to handle them rough. They'd cuss them out and all that stuff. Uncle Fob, he wouldn't stand that."

9. OVERSEER'S HOUSE

10. PIGEON HOUSES

Speaking of the pigeonnier behind the store, Kenneth Prudhomme stated that,

"This one has been moved slightly. Matter of fact, we moved it. Paw-Paw [his father, Alphonse II] had it moved. When we started farming, it crowded us a little bit. We needed more room to get wider equipment through, so we moved it south about a little over the width of the building."

Mayo Prudhomme: "Directly behind the store, to the south, was one of the pigeonniers; which--at one time--was about 5 feet further south. ...Ken and Al had it moved, or Pop did. They moved it about 5 or 10 feet to the north to give them more room out in the field to the south of it. That was where they kept all kinds of paraphernalia for the horses or the mules...the "mule jewelry," down under the bottom...[T]he pigeonaires were two-story, and the pigeon loft was...the upper level. But below, they used for storage in both of them."

Malone: "Did you ever have pigeons in it in your lifetime?"

Mayo Prudhomme: "Oh, my Lord, yes! We used to have squabs on toast for breakfast."

"We had the other pigeonnier at the other end of the land--as we called it at that time--which was about a 150 yards further south...." [He indicated that as far as he knew, that pigeonnier was in its original position].

The pigeon houses continued to be used for storage as well as for housing pigeons after the end of the war. An 1868 inventory of the plantation preparatory to division among Phanor Prudhomme I's heirs lists the items bought by two of the heirs from materials stored in the pigeon houses:

And within present family member's recollection, the pigeon

houses were still serving the two same functions. Kenneth Prudhomme recalle that the pigeon house nearest the store "was always used for insecicides when Grandpa was farming the place. The other one down the lane was where they kept the mule harnesses and gear and the old collars and hames and face chains and everything it took to hook up the mules." And he recalled that in later years, [w]hen Al and I were farming and my daddy-- when he finally went to tractors, he stored his lubricants and mower parts and odds and ends for tractors...."

11. CARRIAGE HOUSE

As far as the Prudhomme family can recall, the carriage house is at its original site. Its original function was as a carriage house, but in the memory of the living Prudhommies, it has served as a garage. Kenneth Prudhomme recalled, "They had the automobiles in there when we were little." "

12. FRUIT TREES AND ORCHARDS

Present family members and former tenants rcalled the presence of fruit trees, garden plots, a grape trellis, and a large pecan orchard. Their various locations are described.

Lawrence Helaire remembered, as a thirteen-year-old boy, earning thirty-five cents per day picking peaches and other fruits in the orchard. On a trip to Oakland he indicated that there was a big orchard to the south of the carriage house. He recalled picking figs, apples, pears, peaches, and tomatoes every day they were in season. The pecan orchard was north of the house where some large pecan trees still remain.

13. COOK'S CABIN AND WASH WOMAN'S CABIN/ FISHING CAMPHOUSES

Kenneth Prudhomme responded to a question concerning the fishing camp: "Cane River Lake was relatively new; it was a extremely good fishing hole, and people came from all over to fish. That was the deep, dark days of the Depression, and they did everything they could to make a buck on the old homeplace... so Grandpa Phanor had two cabins moved. The story that I recall was that one was the cook's house, and one was the washwoman's house that apparently were behind [the Big House]. They couldn't have been down in the quarters. They had to be fairly close to the Big House because they didn't have the facilities to move them that distance. But they moved the two of them out here. One has since gotten in such bad shape, and Paw-Paw needed timbers for repairs to the Big House, so he demolished it and salvaged what he could."

My comments: Kenneth Prudhomme's recollections that the cabins were originally behind the house makes sense. Records from the early 1860s make reference to cabins in the yard.

In the late 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, the family received good income from boat and cabin rentals. Depending upon their size and condition, boats rented for from \$.50 to \$1.00 per day in the 1940s. There was a boat house rental account in 1929.

14. TENANT HOUSES

G. TENANTS AT OAKLAND, 1914-1945

1. ETHNICITY OF TENANTS

The great majority of tenants, both fourth renters and half-hands sharecroppers, were African-American during all periods, from 1868 to 1959, but a few were Creoles. One of the mixed-race/ethnicity tenants who lived among the black tenants on the river quarters was Emile Lorange. Lawrence Helaire remembers him well. His house was located about where Ms. Vivian Prudhomme Flores' mobile home is now.

Malone: "Was he a black man or was he of mixed blood?"

Lawrence: "He was mixed."

Malone: "What did you call the people who were of mixed blood?"

Lawrence: "Well, they'd call them mulattos at that time. It left from free mulattos to then they just called themselves Frenches, mixed."

Lawrence Helaire recalled that Emile Lorange played the guitar for their parties. His father, Felix Helaire played the accordion, and Vansaw Metoyer, also a Creole, played the guitar. He also recalled that Emile Lorange, a tenant on the same place as him, had a brother named Frank who lived with him and also worked for some of the Prudhommes.

[INSERT BIOGRAPHIES OF LORANCE, POCUS METOYER ETC.]

Overseers and cooks associated with the Rainey Metoyer family were also Creoles.

2. TENANT ARRANGEMENTS

Lawrence Helaire was the third-generation to sharecrop on Oakland. His father, Felix Helaire--who was also the syrup-

maker, butcher, and blacksmith--had a better arrangement than most.

Malone: "...Felix had another arrangement?"

Lawrence: "He was a renter...on fourths. A fourth renter."

Malone: "What about the others??"

Lawrence: "They were half-hand tenants...With a half-hand worker, the owner would furnish the tools and the mules and all that stuff."

Malone: "and the seed?"

Lawrence: "Uh-hun. With a fourth-renter, he [the tenant] would furnish his own mules and tools and everything....If you had the fourth, you owned more [of the crop]. Out of every four, the owner get one, you see."

Malone: "so you [the fourth-renter] get three-fourths of it [the crop]?"

Lawrence: "Right."

Malone: And a half-hand, you'd just get half.

Lawrence: "Get half."

Speaking of tenancy on Cane River on another plantation, that of the Pratt family, Lawrence Helaire remarked:

"These are the people here, when you moved on the place sharecropping, when you get ready to leave you couldn't, unless they want you to." Sometimes they'd make them [the tenants] leave before the crop was done....They'd do something to make them leave, put them away. Then they'd have people to harvest it...you see."

3. OCCUPATIONS DURING TENANCY, 1917-1945

BLACKSMITHS

Solomon Williams is perhaps the best known of the Oakland blacksmiths during slavery and early tenancy. However, a store ledger indicates that he must have died in late 1888 or 1889, since he no longer appears in the ledgers or other records after that time.

During the 1920s, '30s and '40s the principal blacksmith was Felix Helaire, the father of one of the narrators. He was also the butcher, syrup maker, and ferry operator.

Ann Malone: "Felix was a blacksmith as well as a syrup maker?"

Lawrence Helaire: "Oh, yes. He used to make brands and made all of the plow points and ladles and everything."

SYRUP MAKER

Malone: He [Felix Helaire, Lawrence's father] was [also] a syrup maker?

Lawrence: Yes, that's right.... We made I don't know how many hundred gallons of syrup....I was a little boy when I first started out driving the mule around the mill."

Mr. Helaire talked about making cane syrup, having taffy pullings, and producing cane beer out of the foam off of the top.

Lawrence Helaire; "They used that foam off of that cane juice. We had plenty left, and one time the hogs got into the juice that soured, and we had a whole lot of hogs drunk."

BUTCHER

The primary butcher within the memory of narrators was also Felix Helaire. Detailed accounts of hog-butcher^{ing} on Oakland are recounted by Prudhomme family members as well as by former tenants.

FERRY OPERATORS

Lawrence Helaire recalled that his father, Felix Helaire, and F. G. Batise, another tenant, operated the ferry across the river to the other side of the plantation. It was very active until the bridge was built in about 1910, but photos clearly show that the ferry was still in use after the bridge^{gk} was constructed.

[GIVE FULL BIOGRAPHY OF FELIX HERE]

GARDENERS

Rainey Metoyer and his son Leo Metoyer served as gardeners as part of their overseeing duties in the 1930s, 1940s, and early 1950s.

[PUT BIOGRAPHICAL INFO ON RAINEY AND
SUZETTE HERE)

COOKS

Cooks of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s include Georgeanna Moses, Suzette Metoyer and her daughter-in-law Camille; Mandy Williams and her daughter, L.V. Williams. The interviews contains a wealth of information concerning these cooks, their duties, and their culinary accomplishments.

[GIVE BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION ON L.V.

WILLIAMS AND MANDY WILLIAMS]

ENGINEER

In the 1920s-1940s, Gabe Nargot was the engineer on the plantation.

WASHERWOMAN

Martha Helaire received \$4.00 wages monthly for washing in the 1940s.

NURSES AND MIDWIVES

Community midwives associated with Oakland are recalled by several women narrators, among these practioners were Mary Edmonds, Amy Toussaint, and Samantha Williams.

4. CASE STUDIES OF WORKERS OF THE 1917-1945 PERIOD

a. NARGOT FAMILY

The Nargo family [variously spelled in the records as Argo, Nago, Nagar, Nagot, and Nargot] has also had a long association with Bermuda-Oakland. The earliest known progenitor of this family is Barbe, who was still alive on Oakland in 1870 at the age of eighty, residing in the household of her son Dersilin [Derzilin] Nargo and his family. Her birthplace on the 1870 census is recorded as Africa where she was born about 1790. Barrbe was probably transported to America by slavers while in

her early teens for on December 7, 1809, she was nineteen and already in the possession of Emmanuel Prudhomme at Bermuda. She was among twenty-two Prudhomme slaves who were baptized in the Catholic faith at the plantation on that occasion. Her parents' names are unknown to us, but her godparents were fellow slaves Jacques and Marie Anne.

Her son Dersilin and daughter-in-law Marie were among the former slaves who stayed on the plantation following emancipation, and are recorded as working on contract in 1866

Among Barbe Nargot's descendants who remained on the plantation during tenancy were her sons Dersilin and Janvier as well as grandsons Dersilin and Gabriel. In his prime, Gabe Nargot was an important part of the plantation operation. For many years he was the engineer for the cotton gin, and he is vividly recalled by several of the older tenants and Prudhomme family members.

Gabe Nargot was born in October, 1867, at Bermuda/Oakland. According to the 1900 census, he married Clarice, last name unknown, and had, at that time two small daughters, Bertha and Evelina.

The ruins of the house that Gabriel Nargo occupied in his old age is still recalled by Prudhomme family members as "Uncle Gabe's house." It was a small cypress and bousillage cabin which is remembered by the Prudhommes as being of post-en-terre construction. It is possible since that type of construction was common in the area during the colonial period and as late as the 1820s. However, porches on Oakland cabins were often not

originally floored, and the posts holding the roof were often placed directly in the ground. This could of been the case with Nargot's cabin as archaeologists thus far have not found evidence of post-en-terre construction at that site. In the 1950s the cabin was occupied by a series of short-term tenants including Wilson and Helaire. Lawrence Helaire recalls that it was in poor shape at that time and was barely habitable.

5. HOUSESERVANTS 1899-1924

A newspaper article from the early 1920s contains brief descriptions of that era's house servants. One individual pictured is described only as "Mammy," "who has nursed four generations of babies...." The writer was told that the Prudhomme children used her cabin as a "refuge of comfort." "She is blind now, and ehen the children who hav married and left the plantation come home to visit, they go first thing to take their children to see her." [reminiscent of Jane DeBlieux's story]. Rhody, last name unidentified, was the current plantation cook, and boasted of "makin' gumbo for Marse Alphonse twenty-nine years." Aunt Narcisse was identified as an earlier cook. Uncle Prince, also pictured, served as the butler, and Peter was the server. Aunt Madeline was also identified as a houseservant.

4. TENANTS' SOCIAL LIFE AND FAMILY LIFE

a. In the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, Oakland was home to many

tenants. With limited transportation options available, they carved out an acceptable life for themselves and their families in relative isolation, much as their parents and grandparents had before them. For major purchases, Natchez was within walking or riding distance. Occasionally, tenant families could get a ride to Natchitoches with someone who had access to an automobile. However, most needs were met on Oakland. According to agricultural historian Gilbert Fite, this was true of most rural southerners in the pre-World War II era:

Many farm folk in the 1930s still never went beyond one of the local towns or villages where they shopped and traded. They generally traveled in wagons pulled by mules, and gathered on the dusty streets on Saturday afternoons to socialize and exchange gossip. Most rural communities did not have paved roads before World War II, and a smaller percentage of southern farmers owned automobiles in 1940 than a decade earlier. Being confined largely to their own community, southern farmers had a strong sense of place.

b. Role of Religion/Importance of St. Paul's

c. Courtship

d. Race Relations

e. Recreation

For the most part, tenant families devised their own recreational outlets and social opportunities. Visiting back and

forth, between residents of the quarters and with families in the tenant houses along the road, was a favorite activity in the cool of the evenings and on weekends. Combined work and play activities were also popular. Both hog-killings and corn-shellings had social aspects. Quilting groups were popular among women. Hunting, fishing, and swimming were favorite male recreations, as was gambling.

Two activities widely engaged in, either as participants or observers, by Cane River residents during the 1930s and early 1940s were horseracing--an antebellum preoccupation as well, and the popular national pastime since the 1890s--baseball. These activities drew people of all ethnic backgrounds and economic strata. Horseraces were held on several tracks in the area. Baseball had been a major fad throughout the nation since the 1920s, and it was almost epidemic along Cane River. The region had leagues, mostly team-segregated, but the informal games between young people on the plantations were often of mixed ethnicity, both in terms of players and observers

CONCLUSIONS

MODERNIZATION, ITS BENEFITS AND PROBLEMS

1945-1960

Part One:

The Setting

I. GENERAL BACKGROUND

From 1914 to 1960 Cane River's plantation country was slowly brought into the regional and national mainstream--impacted by cotton dependency, the Depression of the 1930s, two world wars, boll weevil infestations, mechanization of agriculture, rural electrification, and business consolidations. Changes in transportation had enormous impact. The advent of the automobile, then trucks and trailers, lessened the influence of river-based transportation, or transport by train. All of these

factors contributed to the breakdown of the plantation as a relatively self-contained "island community."

A. AGRICULTURE, 1945-1960

During World War II, Louisiana's agriculture was reinvigorated by the prodigious needs of the armed services for food and clothing. The demand for cotton was great, but it was not international. American cotton was not competitive in world markets even during the war because of price supports and disruptions caused by the war. American cotton mills made heavy demands, however, and the government was able to remove price supports and acreage controls by 1943. Prices increased to 20 cents a pound and prosperity returned to Cane River's plantation country. Major changes were already taking place, however, even in the war years. The labor drain resumed; many young men were drafted, but more importantly, many left farm life for jobs in war factories, often in distant states. Louisiana, in particular, experienced a large decline in the number of black farmers. Both white and black tenant farmers left farms in cotton-producing states because of what Gilbert Fite calls a push-pull factors. "Restricted cotton acreage and increasing mechanization provided the push that forced farmers off the land in the 1930s, and these factors continued to operate in the war period." In the war years, "the main pull was the availability and attractiveness of either part-time or full-time nonfarming employment." Southern and Louisiana farmers, with good money coming in, dealt with the problem of a diminishing labor supply by further mechanization; they had to, in order to remain in

business. The number of tractors almost doubled; hay balers became a more common feature as well. Planters actually reduced their cotton production, despite the high prices, because equally profitable alternative crops were encouraged by the government--especially needed were oil crops such as peanuts and soybeans. Planters and farmers also increased their livestock holdings during the war.

B. MECHANIZATION; WORKER EXODUS

The exodus of surplus agricultural workers, along with mechanization, and some adoption of modern techniques, resulted in a greater prosperity and raised standard of living for Louisiana planters after World War II. On the other hand, not all of those who left farms were able to be absorbed into non-farming occupations. Some didn't have the skills, the capital, the mobility, or the incentive to make such drastic changes in their lives.

Between 1945 and 1960 a virtual revolution occurred in southern agriculture. With mechanization, the old plantation system increasingly faded away; sharecropping disappeared; the very landscape was drastically altered.

C. ADVANCES IN TECHNOLOGY AND COMMUNICATION

The revolution in agriculture was accompanied by revolutionary changes in transportation and communication, changes that had begun in the affluent 1920s, were interrupted by the Depression, and accelerated in the latter 1940s and 1950s. Much of the loneliness and isolation of rural life was dispelled by the automobile, much improved roads, generally better

communication, including telephone service for some, and, especially, the rural electrification movement. As stated by historian Thomas Clark, "Turning on the lights in a rural home for the first time was akin to spiritual rebirth." Electricity made possible labor-saving devices such as refrigerators and washing machines, and radios. Expectations rose, and rural people worked hard to buy these items, as much for their symbolism as anything else:

Porches were lined with washing machines and refrigerators as though these conveniences symbolized a better social status. A man with a washing machine and a refrigerator, even if they were on his front porch, was at least keeping step with the times, and was announcing to the world that he was willing to meet both the challenge of the future and the installment collector.

D. GENERAL PROSPERITY

E. COLD WAR INSECURITIES

F. BUSINESS CONSOLIDATIONS

G. ADVENT OF MASS CONSUMER SOCIETY

H. CULTURAL REVOLUTION

I. CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Part Two

PRUDHOMME FAMILY, 1945-1960

I. FAMILY DEVELOPMENTS

- A. GENEALOGICAL INFORMATION
- B. BIOGRAPHIES OF PHONSIE, LULU
- C. FAMILY LIFE
- D. RELIGION
- E. RECREATION
- F. EDUCATION
- G. FILMING

II. AGRICULTURE/MECHANIZATION

Mechanization of agriculture in the South was a slow process; it would take several decades before Cane River tenants were

"tractored out." Mechanization was not widespread in the 1940s, but some farmers purchased tractors to lower production costs, at first attaching old mule-drawn equipment to the tractors. As they could afford it, they bought plows and disks designed for tractors.

New Deal policies helped some, but it took the stimulation of demands by W.W. II to end the depression. By 1943 cotton prices had increased to 20 cents per pound and prosperity came back to Cane River's plantations, ushering in good prices in the latter 40s. Despite the general prosperity of the 1940s and 1950s for Cane River planters, major changes were taking place that would ultimately destroy traditional plantation agriculture.

The labor drain resumed. In the war years, non-farming occupations were attractive, and restricted acreage and mechanization caused some younger tenants to leave.

In the late 40s, many planters began using their good profits to mechanize, hedging against the problem of a diminishing labor supply and to keep up with competition.

Between 1945 and 1960 a revolution occurred. With mechanization, the old plantation system faded away, as did sharecropping. The landscape was once more drastically altered as tenant shacks were torn down, and individual farms erased. Mule lots and barns were replaced with tractor sheds and cotton picker sheds.

AGRICULTURE IN THE 1930s and 40s

A Gin Book for Oakland in September of 1939 and 1940 identifies Felix Helaire and his sons Lawrence and Emage [Emmett] Helaire still as Fourth hands, that is, they received three-

fourths of the crop, subject to deductions. Other sons Earl and Charley were both Half hands in 1939, but Charley was also a Fourth hand in 1940. Hamilton Moody also farmed as a Fourth Hand.

Although cotton continued to be the money crop in the early 1940s and beyond, Oakland ledger books reveal that its sharecroppers also produced corn and clover, and the tenants received wages for day work on the plantation as well. For example, in 1941 Earl Helaire was paid for helping with a slate roof, hauling hay, hauling wood, and repairing a field fence. A 1941 note indicates that fourth-hands, even though they had some of their own mules and equipment, sometime were rented or loaned more. In May Felix Helaire rented one "mule jack" for \$15 and borrowed a cultivator, six scratchers, and three sweeps.

III. LABOR/END OF TENANCY

When asked about the end of tenancy, Lawrence Helaire discusses such factors as the boll weevil and the Great Depression but considers mechanization of cottonpicking a major factor.

Malone: "So ...about when was that, when they started leaving the farms and sharecropping?

Lawrence Helaire: "It really got kicked off in the forties."

Malone: "How was the decision made [to leave]?"

Lawrence Helaire. "[W]e had to go somewhere where we could find something to do and make some money."

Lawrence Helaire was one of the earlier tenants to leave Oakland, in 1949. He and his wife made the decision for economic reasons; the Prudhomme family would have liked for them to stay. However, by 1959, the Prudhommes had no choice but to end sharecropping, and the decision was extremely emotional for both owners and tenants, as Atlas and Lucinda Helaire attest in their long interviews.

John Batten, who married Kathleen Prudhomme, took over the farming of Edward Carrington's portion of Oakland [Riverside] in 1958. He explained the last decade of tenancy before mechanization entirely replaced it.

In 1958, he observed, "the first thing I noticed was we had some mules still pulling plows and doing farm work, but we also had several tractors."

"We had two classes of ownership and production. We had one part of it called a half-hand system, where you had employees that would take a share of the...crop for doing most of the work--the picking, the planting, the harvesting, the cultivating, and all this...For that, they would receive half of the proceeds of the crops..."

"We also used a wage system that was strictly controlled and supervised and owned by the owners, which was us. Anybody who dealt in that was just...working on an hourly basis, and all proceeds...came to the owner. So it was two separate systems going on." Batten explained that the share-crop arrangement was phased out

in the 1960s. "By 1970 all those people were gone."

IV. IMPACT OF ADVANCES IN TECHNOLOGY/TRANSPORTATION/COMMUNICATION

V. SPATIAL CHANGES ON PLANTATION LANDSCAPE

CIRCULATION PATTERNS ON THE PLANTATION, 1945-1960

Mayo Prudhomme and Vivian Prudhomme Flores recalled that the main thoroughfare through the plantation was still the antebellum lane (see map at the workshop) which they likened to a hallway, with paths or roads going off to various work and recreational areas in the plantation. There were, of course, turn rows in the fields.

Lawrence Helaire recalled the same thing. However, there were short cuts. For example, if they needed to go to the cemetery area from his quarters near the bridge, they would sometimes use a "cut off trail from the river road through the pecan orchard."

Note: A January 25, 1867 reference mentions repairing the large bridge in lane," but whether this is still the plantation thoroughfare the family refers to as "the lane" is not known.

Also, in a February 8 1867 entry, it is noted that "[f]our wagons hauling Rails along lane fence over River."

VI. BUILDINGS AND FEATURES

A. BIG HOUSE

B. GARDENS

C. OVERSEER'S HOUSE

There is no indication that the overseer's house has been moved. Vivian Flores Prudhomme: "The building that we're coming up to right here is the overseer's house, and it is [also] a raised cottage, though on a much smaller scale. The overseers always, to my knowledge, lived there whether they were white or black. In our lifetime there was Ranie Metoyer, who was overseer for my grandfather, and then his son, Leo Metoyer, was overseer for my Pop. They lived there. Then after Leo....my brothers continued to use it for the hand who helped them with their farming operation."

MEMORIES OF THE OVERSEER'S HOUSE, 1940S AND 1950S

Occupants of the overseer's house within the memory of narrators were, first, Rainey and Suzette Metoyer, then Leo and Camille

Metoyer and their family as well as Leo's parents [Rainey and Suzette]. Now widowed, Camille Metoyer recalls the following outbuildings or structures associated with the house: in the fenced yard, an outhouse, hog pen, chicken coop; outside the yard, a storage shed. Her interview is accompanied by a sketch of the house and its environs.

ENVIRONS OF THE OVERSEER'S HOUSE, 1940S, 1950S

According to long-time occupant Camille Metoyer, cook and sometimes washerwoman for the Big House and wife of the overseer, the Overseer's House was enclosed by a fence which had pickets in the front only; the other three sides were enclosed with wire fences. The yard was a "scraped yard" at first; later "someone got a lawnmower" and grass was allowed to grow. She, or her mother-in-law Suzette, had planted red rosebushes on each side of the path from the front gate to the front porch. On each side of the same path, close to the fence but inside the yard were a row of white easter lilies, Jacob's ladders (some of which remain and bloom in the spring), and narcissis. On the south side of the house and within the fenced yard were two pink crepe myrtle trees. The vegetable garden was on that same side, to the back and outside the yard. Her interview is accompanied by a plat of the house and yard as she recalled it.

OUTBUILDINGS AT THE OVERSEER'S HOUSE, 1940S, 1950S

D. CARRIAGE HOUSE

Kenneth Prudhomme:

there, we opened the back

end and concreted the floor and made a shop out of it."

Several of the oral histories describe the carriage house and its various uses.

E. FENCING IN THE 1940S AND 1950S

After World War II, wire fencing became common throughout the Cane River plantation country. At Oakland, many but not all of the old rail and board fences and hedgerows. The various wire fences on the plantation have been replaced and moved many times. I specifically asked narrators about the quarters gate. Former tenant Lawrence Helaire had specific knowledge of it.

Malone: "I hear there was a gate there; they called it the gate to the quarters. Do you remember that gate?"

Lawrence: "Yeah, right there, in the intersection at the bridge."

Malone: "It was a wooden gate?"

Lawrence: Yes. I helped build that gate....That's where we used to keep the cattle and horses and mules. All that would go way on down along ... to the other bend of the road."

Malone: "Was this fenced in?"

Lawrence: "Yes, fenced on both sides. Had a bois d'arc [hedge] laying all the way down."

F. TRACTOR SHED, CA. 1950S

Vivian Prudhomme Flores said that the tractor shed was built by her brothers Alphonse Prudhomme III and Kenneth Prudhomme in the 1950s or 60s.

G. TENANT CABINS AND ENVIRONS

As far as I have been able to determine, the extant cabins to the south of the Big House were in their present location within the memory of everyone interviewed. Without early plats showing building locations, it is difficult to know whether they were moved earlier. We do indeed know several of the 1940S and 1950s occupants of the extant cabins, as well as those of the ruins of the cabin that was located between the overseer's house and the cabin under the large oaks.

CABIN ONE (that cabin nearest the road, in the most southerly position) was occupied by the Ben Helaire family and others in the 1940s and early 1950s.

CABIN TWO (the cabin under the large oaks and near the gate) was occupied by various tenants through the years. For part of the 1930s it was occupied by Edward Helaire and his family [Lawrence Helaire's uncle]. Later, Charlie Helaire lived there, then Earl Beard, then Mandy and L.V. Williams and L.V.'s children.

Malone: "The cabin right by the gate to the right, under the great big oak tree--Mr. Helaire, do you remember this? Who lived there within your lifetime?"

Lawrence Helaire: "Uncle Edward [Helaire] was living there first--Charlie's daddy. [Then] Charlie [Helaire] and Earl [Beard]....[It] used to have dirt floor in there first; then they built it up, put floors in [it]; and around all that was made out of lats and dirt. [We called them] dirt houses."

In 1945, Mandy Williams and her daughter L.V. Williams and L.V.'s children moved into this cabin. First Mandy, then L.V. Williams, cooked for the Prudhommes. Kenneth and Mayo Prudhomme and Vivian Prudhomme Flores sometimes refer to this cabin as the "cook's house," because it was that during their childhood. However, this cabin should not be confused with the much older "cook's house" originally located behind the Big House, which was moved to the north of the house and converted into a fishing camphouse.

Ivory Williams Augustus, a daughter of L.V. Williams recalls many details of the house and yard during their eleven years' of occupancy. The porch had a plain wooden rocker on it, its only furnishings except on wash day when they brought out the tub and washboard. As one entered the front door, into the big room, the fireplace was on the right. The kerosene lamp was always on the big mantle, and "hard bottom wooden chairs were in front of the fireplace, facing it." The room also contained two double beds. Her grandmother slept in one of the beds, and the children in the other. Her mother, L.V. Williams, slept in the little back room as long as her own mother was alive. Ms. Augustus continued to provide a detailed description of the house and furnishings, and

a sketch of the house and yard is included with her interview. The yard was enclosed with a "hog wire fence," and the flowers included lilies, Jacob's Ladder, and verbenas. She also describes the vegetable garden and various small outbuildings.

RUINS OF CABIN THREE was occupied by several tenants over time, but it is primarily associated in the Prudhomme family's recollection with the engineer, Gabe Nargot.

In a tour of the site, Lawrence Helaire identified the ruins as that of "Gabe's" cabin. Mr. Helaire remembered Gabe Nargo, who he said was "a little older than my daddy" "living there by himself...for a few years. Then he moved out...[and] Louis Johnson moved in there. He moved out, and by that time my oldest brother [Emage Helaire] had gotten married, and he moved in that old house." He later moved into one of the larger tenant houses. Lawrence Helaire remembered that Gabe Nargot [which he pronounces Nongo] was "the engineer for the cotton gin."

YARDS, GARDENS, OUTBUILDINGS OF THE TENANT HOUSES, 1940S, 1950S

Of the former tenants who were interviewed, several recalled the yards and outbuildings of the cabins they occupied. Some of these buildings have been demolished, but their recollections appear to be fairly representative.

Elnora Helaire recalled a "dirt yard," as did several others. She recalled, "In those days, they didn't mow yards like they mow now. We would scrape that grass, you know." She "planted a few flowers, but not many" in the yard which had "a little fence around it."

She remembered a "round cistern", an outhouse back of the house, a smoke house, a chicken house, and her garden, in which she grew "okra and mustard greens, collard greens...water-melons, new potatoes, peanuts...all of that." Her interview is accompanied by a plat of the layout.

Lawence Helaire also described the house and yard of his parents' home and his own, both on Oakland. His interviews are also accompanied by simple plats. He said his mother's yard had grass which they kept free of weeds by chopping. His mother "had flowers, beautiful flowers. I used to help grow them...roses, lilies."

Mr. Helaire indicated that their yard was enclosed with a picket or slat fence nailed together [to posts] nine feet apart. In the front they had a small wooden gate and in the back a double gate "if you wanted to bring the wagon inside." There were lots of fruit trees in the yard. The garden was inside the yard but changed places from year to year.

Tenant families have vivid memories of their own homes. For example, Elnora Helaire, who was married to the recently deceased Charlie Helaire, lived at Oakland from 1952 to 1966 in a tenant house that is now gone. She described her cabin as "not far from the bridge", between where Lawrence Helaire's cabin had been [but demolished by 1952] and Emage Helaire's. She recalled that during her tenure at Oakland, Ben Helaire's family lived in the extant cabin closest to the road, across from 494, and the L.V. Williams family occupied the

cabin under the large oaks. In her oral history, Elnora Helaire gave a detailed description of her house at Oakland and assisted in drawing a plat which shows placement of furniture, outbuildings, and plantings. She recalled that her cabin originally consisted on a one-room "mud-walled" house (single pen) with a front porch, which, over the years had a room added to the side, a "drop room" [shed room] added to the back, and a kitchen and back porch added in the 1950s to the rear, the kitchen moved from another cabin.

Lawrece Helaire married

in 19

After a while they moved into a "little house about across from Uncle Ben's. He described this structure in detail. Part of this house was used in the building of a town residence for Alphonse Prudhomme III in the 1970s.

Lucinda and Atlas Helaire also provided a detailed description and rough plat of their home and environs.

(decribe here)

OTHER WORKERS

Ledgers show that Georgeanna Moses cooked at the Big House in 1941, receiving a monthly wage of \$7.00. That same year Martha Helaire was the washerwoman, with a \$4.00 per month salary. However, Camille Metoyer, wife of the stockman Leo Metoyer, was also taking in washing, with a monthly wasge of \$5.00. Her charges at the store often reflect her work, including such things as a washtub, clothes pins, and bluing. Leo, identified as "stock and yard man" earned a monthly wage of \$22 in 1941.

FURNISHINGS IN THE TENANT HOUSES, 1940S, 1950S

Many of the tenants' interviews have great details concerning their living spaces.

H. SQUARE CRIB

Mayo Prudhomme described the square crib as a "cantilevered building...a rarity in itself, the way it is constructed. That was used, in my memory, to store corn. They would start storing it through the bottom door, and as it filled up, they would lock that door, and then go to an upper door to fill it up almost all the way to the roof. They also used some of the areas under the cantilever overhang to feed calves, or store hay...."

Vivian Flores Prudhomme: "It is very square and very much on the same order as the "African House" [at Melrose]. It has a free-standing roof all the way around. It's a log building, and it's interesting that each log has a roman numeral on it....its where the corn was stored. I don't know what else it might have been used for, prior to Pop and Grandpa using it for corn."

CONCLUSIONS

The transitions that were demanded by the end of tenancy were extremely difficult for all concerned, despite the evils of the system.

We have little oral testimony to tell us about the transition from slavery to freedom, but we have rich documentation from the Prudhommes and their tenants concerning the challenges of what perhaps will--in the long run --be an even greater watershed than

the Civil War-- mechanization and consolidation.

Pierre Phanor Prudhomme II died in 1948; his son, Alphonse Prudhomme II, his wife Lucile Keator Prudhomme, and their children: Al, Kenneth, Mayo, and Vivian have lived through Oakland's greatest changes, as have families whose roots on the same land are equally deep.

Listen to some of Oakland's workers speak about these monumental changes.

CONCERNING FREQUENT MOVES:

Clara Roberson Johnson: "My daddy did a lot of moving. Did so much 'til I married young, just to get out of it...when I was fifteen. I got tired of moving around. It wasn't doing nothing; wasn't getting ...much of schooling. I had to quit school to go pick cotton and all like that. And I was real smart in school. We was just a-moving."

CONCERNING THE DECISION TO LEAVE PERMANENTLY:

Lawrence Helaire was one of the first to move off the farm, in 1949. He made the decision while he could still have stayed and farmed.

Kenneth Prudhomme spoke of that move.

"[Lawrence Helaire] was one of the first ones to leave the farm after World War II when the big exodus came with the advent of machinery and better paying jobs in town. They went to better themselves and apparently all have done that. They were all

fine, honest, upstanding, hardworking people, very one of them."

With Atlas and Lucinda Helaire, the decision was not their own; it was made by Reginald Prudhomme, reluctantly.

Atlas Helaire recalls that, "Mr. Reginald told me, 'I'm fixing to do something I hate to do...'"

"I said, 'What's that?'"

"He said, 'I know you like to make a crop, [but} I'm not going to have no sharecroppers, so you [will have to] do something else. I'll ask Mr. Alton about a house for you.'"

"I said, 'Don't worry about me; I'll find somewhere to go.'"

"He did it on a Saturday, and I told my wife about it. She didn't want to leave. She started crying. Our daughter was just fixing to get married. That Monday, I got my brother and a friend...and they come on up here and started building a house (in 1961). It was January before [we] could move."

When the Prudhommes heard that he was having a house built, one told Atlas, "We would hire you a carpenter just to get you started."

But Atlas replied, "Never mind. I thank you just the same."

With this courteous and dignified exchange, the Prudhommes and one of the last, if not the last, Helaires parted, ending a relationship between the families and with the land that we now call Oakland that had persisted for 153 years.

EPILOGUE: 1960-1988

I. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

II. THE PRUDHOMMES AND OAKLAND ADJUST TO AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

A. FAMILY CHANGES

INVENTIVENESS

Inventiveness was a major characteristic of the people of Oakland. Grandpa Keator invented a number of things, and recently granddaughter Julie Prudhomme (Mayo and Annette's daughter) spoke of finding old patent application papers in the attic for a toaster, developed by "Grandpa Alphonse". The family has a letter from Alphonse Prudhomme II's professor at the University of North Carolina to the young man's father [Phanor Prudhomme II] commenting upon his abilities and potential for engineering. It was he, Alphonse II, who, according to Mayo, "built the spillway back on Isle Brevelle" and built the gin in its present location.

The inventive spirit was passed on to "Phonsie". Mayo recalled that "If you gave Paw-Paw a Prince Albert can and a link of bailing wire, he could fix anything." And, Annette remembered of her fastidious father-in-law, "If he wanted to, he could take a car apart in a suit and never get a speck of oil on him."

KINDNESS/ PERSONALITIES

ALPHONSE J. PRUDHOMME

Not only his own children, but his daughter-in-laws recall this man with such emotion that tears often came to their eyes when recalling him:

Annette Berry Prudhomme talked of her "bonding" with Paw-Paw, of

his kindness and tact, and the way that he [and his family] handled his disability of blindness and near deafness in his old age with his characteristic grace.

"I remember after we had Julie and Tad, they had some brick steps that went down in front and through the years they had become worn. I was walking down the stairs one day, and I had a baby in each arm. And because the steps were worn and slick, my feet went out from under me, and I fell down the steps...but I never dropped the children....And Paw-Paw was so upset about it...the next time I came down, there were new steps."

new
steps
at
Front

"Paw-Paw and I loved to sit on the porch, especially when there was a full moon, and he would call a lot of times wherever we lived, and say that he missed me that night because there was a full moon, and he wanted to sit out on the porch with me."

"You just bond with some people because they're so kind and loving and gentle, and that's how I felt about Paw-Paw. There was just a bond from the first day I met him."

B. AGRICULTURE

A way of life passed both for owners and workers by 1970. Al and Kenneth Prudhomme farmed, leasing many surrounding places, beginning in the later 1950s, but it was mechanized farming using

day labor.

PROSPERITY OF 70S/HARD TIMES OF THE 80S

Adjustments were equally difficult for the Prudhomme family. They accommodated to the new requirements of mechanization, and the Prudhomme brothers did well in the early 1970s. But the process of consolidation and the cost/price squeeze that had forced small farmers out earlier, by the 1980s, affected family-owned plantations, requiring owners to face the same grim reality.

Although the property remained in the family's hands, eventually the Prudhomme sons would also have to seek other livelihoods. An era had passed by the mid 1980s.

In an article entitled "Farmers Watch as Lives Fade Away," in the April 8, 1984 edition of the New Orleans Times Picayune, the passing of an era and impact of the changes on families are detailed.

Staff writer David Snyder attended farm auctions in North Louisiana, including Natchitoches, and filed a compelling story reminiscent of the Depression years. North Louisiana had been

named a disaster for the past four years. "Escalating production costs and uncertain market prices, farmers say, make the business a gamble each year. A bankrupt cotton and soybean farmer attending a recent Natchitoches auction said that, in recent years, he received \$58 for an acre of soybeans that cost \$180 to raise." More and more north Louisiana farmers and planters were selling out or going bankrupt. "A few big farmers and agri-corporations are producing the cotton, rice, soybeans, corn, sugarcane and other crops in Louisiana."

Economists predicted in 1984, 10 percent of Louisiana farmers would go out of business. "In 1969, 21,000 farms produced 90 percent of the crops in Louisiana. Today, 9,000 to 10,000 farms produce 90 percent of the crops," said Clyde St. Clergy, an LSU agricultural economist. Richard Easley of the Tallulah Production Credit Association predicted that in 2000, 90 percent of farm production would be made by 10 percent of the nation's farmers. In 1984 40 percent of farmers having FHA loans were behind in payments. Equity in their farms had plummeted.

Most of the farmers interviewed spoke hopelessly of their situation. Although they did not go bankrupt, Oakland's Prudhomme brothers were among those who decided to stop farming. With characteristic grace and good humor, they described the situation to the reporter.

Seven generations of Prudhommes farmed Oakland Plantation for almost 200 years. It is said to be the finest cotton plantation west of the Mississippi River.

Recently, two Prudhomme brothers made sure their generation would be the last. They auctioned off their 30-year accumulation of farm machinery. They'll lease the land to neighboring farmers.

Ken Prudhomme, a big jolly man, made light of the decision. "The family has been at it for well on to 200 years and finally decided we couldn't make a living at it," Prudhomme said. He roared with laughter.

The Prudhommes are among a growing number of Louisiana farmers who are either getting out voluntarily, or being forced out.

Prudhomme stood at the edge of a field that runs up to the yard of a spacious raised cypress cottage built by slaves in 1821. The plantation, a few miles east of Natchitoches, looks out on Cane River.

In front of him was a field full of tractors, combines, cotton pickers, cotton wagons, discs, planters, and a thousand other items needed to farm 2,500 acres. In a few minutes, they would be sold to the highest bidder.

"I guess the hardest thing I had to do was tell my son not to farm," Prudhomme said. "I said, 'go to school, become a doctor and make a lot of money. Then you can own a farm.'"

Said his bearded brother Al Prudhomme, "It's the only business I know where you buy retail and sell wholesale."

"The return is not there for the gamble that's involved," said Ken Prudhomme. "You can go to Las Vegas and put money in the slot machines, and you'd be better off."

"I'm tired of it," he said. "I want to get out before I go broke."

The Prudhomme land is some of the best in the Red River Valley. It is called "ice cream" land.

"The land is as good as God ever made," Ken Prudhomme said. "We're sitting on 100 feet of top soil." But, finally, nothing made staying in worthwhile, he said.

"I feel like a weight has been lifted off me," said Prudhomme.

"As a matter of fact," said Al Prudhomme, "I've had a lump in my stomach for the last 25 years."

One day recently Ken Prudhomme was driving along Cane River. He realized that, even though the decision had been made to get out of farming, he was looking out over the fields and worrying.

"We'd had about three inches of rain, and I saw all of that wet ground, and then I thought, 'Damn! I don't have to worry about it being too wet to plow.'"

Commenting on the Times-Picayune article, "Just Talkin'" columnist for the Natchitoches Times noted:

It is a sad, sad story, JT thinks. But what's worse is that it's not an isolated incident. The truth is, there are more and more farmers, here as well as everywhere, who are going under. The federal Farmer's Home Administration says that in Natchitoches alone there are about 100 farmers who are delinquent on their loan of nearly \$6.5 million. That's this year. That's not to mention the ones who have already met their match. What exactly the outcome will be is anybody's guess. But one thing is for certain, whatever becomes of our farms and farmers, it will greatly affect our community which has such strong agricultural roots.

1988 DECLARATION OF OAKLAND AS A BICENTENNIAL FARM

CONCLUSION

As we had on so many occasions over the past two years, we were sitting around Ken and Sally Prudhomme's dining room table, strewn with maps, notes, coffee cups and a tape recorder. Kenneth tried to explain the emotional connection between his

family and the land. He came up with an example that made it clear. "How many families do you know, now, who after burying their beloved father, go up in the woods and make a bonfire?" Native peoples perhaps, I thought, but not many Anglos. With others at the table nodding in agreement, he quietly spoke of how after returning from his father's funeral in 1991, they decided to seek comfort and celebrate his spiritual homecoming in a place that had nourished the Prudhomme family for two hundred years, the hills and forests of the Kisatchie. They drove to a familiar spot, where they often picknicked as a family, or went to alone to think out a problem. There, overlooking the woods and Cane River valley that had nurtured their forebearers, they said goodbye to their husband and father, underneath a canopy of stars. With the sounds of the swaying pines as their only accompaniment, he spoke of him and his life, and spontaneously began to sing, hymns, but also the songs of his youth, who he had taught them. The Kisatchie forest, like the river, was an inextricable part of them, in 1991 as surely as in 1780, though the family had never held title to much of it. When Lulu died in 1994, her children said farewell in the same way.

Oakland too is part and parcel of every member of the Prudhomme family, and that includes many of their long-time employees. Although much of it now belongs to the Park Service and the People, its legacy continues in the descendants of Jean Pierre Emmanuel and Catherine, and Hilario and Jeanne and countless others who have worked the deep rich soils of Oakland.

POST SCRIPT

This story, repeated over and over on Oakland, in Louisiana, and throughout the South, is one of the most important in American History. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, industrialization and urbanization forever transformed a way of life that peoples in America {and before that in Europe and Africa} had practiced forever. To convey how Oakland's residents, owners and enslaved people and employees (workers all) coped with those many changes is a story that has enormous significance.

Parts of the plantation now called Oakland date back to the 1780s. since that time, the Prudhomme family has been in continuous residence, and Oakland's cotton fields have been planted and harvested without interruption since the early nineteenth century. How did the plantation survive under the same ownership? The key to its success appears to have been the ability of its owners and managers to continue the customs and practices that worked while adjusting to the challenges presented by circumstance and technology.

The epic of the Cane River Plantation country is complex, with fascinating variations, but in microcosm it is a story of what happened to much of the South and even the nation as it moved from a rural, agrarian nation to one which, by 1870, was becoming increasingly urban and industrial. It is a story of change. Some, when they visit Oakland feel transported back in time.

This sensation is deceptive, however. Despite its sometimes seemingly static appearance and timeless features, the Cane River Plantation country was and is ever evolving, always in flux. That dynamic quality needs to be understood and conveyed to the public. To do so assists visitors in understanding and coping with changes in their own lives.

It is also a story of cohesiveness and continuity as well as change, and it demonstrates how, over time, people along Cane River successfully coped with multiple economic, political, and social changes, partially by tenaciously holding on to their cultural traditions. The story of Oakland (and Magnolia) and the Cane River plantation country is not the story of one group, or two, but of many, drawn from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, social and economic strata, and representing both town and rural populations.

Along Cane River, from 1714 to 1960 a European frontier fort and trading outpost developed into a complicated agricultural society. That agricultural society met many traumatic challenges occasioned by demographic shifts, wars, depressions, and changes in technologies. Displacements and adjustments are still ongoing, but--if history is a reliable guide--the area will not only survive, it will persevere, and add yet another rich dimension to the history and cultural fabric of the state and nation.